

DOROTHY CHARQUES

A Wind from the Sea

JOHN MURRAY

Dorothy Charques 1917

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AUTHORITIES

Since my main concern here has been with men and women and the impact of events upon them I have relied for my background facts upon the Histories and Memoirs, the Letters and Diaries and personal documents of the time. I have found the *Life, Progresses and Rebellion of James, Duke of Monmouth*, by George Roberts, in two volumes dated 1844, invaluable. For a general narrative of events I have drawn freely upon Macaulay's *History of England*, as examined and to a small extent amended in the light of modern scholarship by Sir Charles Firth and Mr Godfrey Davies in Sir Charles Firth's *Commentary upon Macaulay's History*.

PART ONE
THREE SHIPS IN THE BAY

THREE SHIPS IN THE BAY

YOU will swear the story I have to tell began on the eleventh of June, sixteen eighty-five, when the three ships sailed into Lyme Bay and rebellion broke in the six counties of the English West.

I think it began at a different point in time for each one of us concerned. For my uncle, Edmund Hawkesley, it began when, a young man of eighteen, he rode out to fight at Worcester by General Cromwell's side in his dead father's place; for my Aunt Margaret it began when my Uncle Edmund brought her, some ten years later, an Anglican parson's daughter from Powick in Worcestershire and his newly-wedded wife, into Nonconformist Lyme. For my cousin, John Hawkesley, I think it began from the hour that he was born, two years later, my uncle's only son and his second and paler shadow. Where Oliver Bland, John's friend and mine, is concerned I am not so certain. He always said that life changed for him when he saw Colonel Algernon Sidney die upon the scaffold in the second King Charles's time. From that day in December, sixteen hundred and eighty-three, like Colonel Sidney himself, he came to set liberty and the law above the King's will and his own life, above everything.

For my own part I was bound to the same Cause from my earliest days. I was no more than three years old when my uncle took me to the *Green Ribbon Club*, and the gentlemen toasted me as I stood on the long table amid the silver cups and the spilled wine, and Colonel Richard Rumbold, that renowned Parliament man, pinned a sprig of Leveller Green, badge of the New Country Party, in my white cap. My uncle had brought me that day from Canterbury, where his sister, my mother, though I did not know it then, had died. That same night, while I slept most of the way, we travelled from London by the night coach to Lyme.

I knew nothing of the *Green Ribbon Club* at that time — how

should I know? — nor of the New Country Party whose headquarters it was. I remember only the filtered green light that came into the room from the plane trees outside and how strange I felt, like a child in a wood overawed by green leaves.

If I knew nothing of the Club then, I know more now. It met in a long upstairs room of the *King's Head Tavern* in Atheist Alley, opposite the Inner Temple and not far from London's Strand. The Earl of Shaftesbury had been the leader of the New Country Party while he lived; when he died in exile in Holland the Duke of Monmouth, the late King Charles's natural son by Mistress Lucy Walters, succeeded him.

The Party stood for Liberty and Parliamentary government and the Law as Englishmen had made it and defended it for over six hundred years. In the New Country my uncle and his friends desired there would be no tyranny, whether of private persons or priests or Kings, and the English and Scottish and Welsh people would remain Protestant under their own separate Protestant churches as they wished to do. During the late King Charles the Second's lifetime the Party had wished for religious reasons to exclude the King's brother and only lawful heir, James, Duke of York, a devout Catholic, from the throne and put the Duke of Monmouth, a staunch Protestant, in his place.

They had failed. The Duke of Monmouth and many members of the New Country Party had been in exile in Holland for two years or more when this tale begins. In February of sixteen eighty-five King Charles the Second had died; in the following April the Duke of York, as King James the Second, was safely crowned. I say 'safely', for no-one in England had uttered any open threat of rebellion yet. In Holland Prince William of Orange, Protestant leader of Europe though he was, carried himself in all outward appearances like King James's nephew and heir and loyal son-in-law, while the Duke of Monmouth, for all anyone knew to the contrary, had made no move either.

True, the Duke's companion in exile, Archibald Campbell, Earl of Argyl, head of the clan Campbell, had landed (it was said) at Dunstafnage in Scotland in the hope of rallying the Western Highlands against the King. He had landed (it was said again) on the tenth of May. Since then no more had been heard

of him. Having gathered a few followers together he had vanished, it seemed, into his own Highland mists, leaving behind him a nervous expectation of more landings to come and a feeling of uncertainty in the English air.

Throughout May strangers in obvious disguises appeared in Lyme and disappeared again; boats with muffled oars put into the Cob after dark, discharged their cargoes and put out once more. In my uncle's house on the cliff top the stairs, usually so silent, creaked under the tread of unfamiliar feet; when the house was quiet and all of us were abed the latch of our spare room door would lift softly sometimes, then fall once more into place. Even when no sound was heard a flicker of candlelight, fugitive as any moth, would show for a moment, night after night, on the landing outside my chamber door.

The month of May passed and June followed and everywhere about us anxieties grew. Superstitious folk found confirmation for their fears at home and further afield and in the skies: in earth tremors and great whizzings of wind in the Mendip hills, in the birth of Siamese twins to a poor woman in the village of Illbrewers, and a devilish shrieking of owls all night from a skeleton tree in Uplyme.

My cousin John and I laughed at so many ill-omens. We had a mind, you must understand, lifted far above merely superstitious fears. Besides that we had our own private causes for concern. Though this was his busy trading season my uncle spent long half hours in our garden on the cliff top, perspective glass to his eyes, looking out to sea while my Aunt Margaret, whom nothing troubled as a rule, appeared at once too smiling and too red-eyed, as if she smiled by day only to weep by night. As if this were not enough Gramercy, our maid, who had an uncomfortable habit of prophesying Cassandra-wise, went about her tasks in the house most gloomily, a world of woe she dared not utter upon her face. Of all our household only my cousin Dinah, whom we called Dimity, remained unperturbed. She was no more than three and heedless as a flower.

While the fine June weather held John and I were able to put most of our uneasiness on one side. My uncle's undertakings — he was a merchant of Exeter serges in the town — were

prospering and there was much for us to do. John was active about my uncle's affairs in the warehouse and outside while I was busy with my Aunt Margaret in the house. In these short weeks of summer my uncle's packmen went everywhere about the lanes to Bristol and Taunton and Shepton Mallet and Exeter itself, and returned laden with the fine serges and the scarlet cloth which my uncle exported again in Captain Julian's ships to Calais and Boulogne and Amsterdam. Hardly a week passed at this time in any year when some unexpected guest did not arrive to spend the night with us and go on again — some portly burgher from Ghent or Brussels, some slim or not so slim learner from London, or Norwich, or the North. There was never a day except Sunday my cousin John did not spend in my uncle's warehouse that smelled most vilely of wool under the cliff.

The day that was to set so many other events in motion dawned only mistily. Since it was my seventeenth birthday and the day on which my betrothal to John was expected, I was awake early. The dawn was no more than a yellow stain in the sky when I looked out, but even at this early hour the ships were there, one large vessel and two small plying to windward in the deep water of Lyme Bay as though waiting for the right moment to come in.

What ships were they? I thought sleepily. And why were they there? Dropping my curtain once more into place, I slept again.

By six of the clock when I awoke once more the ships were no nearer. At seven o'clock everyone was talking of them. Thomas Tye, our Surveyor of Customs at Lyme, had gone out in the Customs boat to question them, it seemed, and had not returned. Samuel Robins, a fisherman of Charmouth, whom we all knew, had drawn near them with his crew of two in his fishing boat. All three men had been taken on board the largest ship and detained. Throughout the morning the ships swung at anchor, peacefully, giving out no signals, flying no colours, with scarcely a soul moving on board. They were armed, Lyme fishermen declared, and of Dutch or French rig.

As the morning wore on curiosity turned to uneasiness in our minds, uneasiness swelled to suspicion and alarm. What ships

were they? everyone asked. Why were they here? More importantly — who was on board? Two names, and two names only, were in all our minds. As yet no-one dared utter them.

Towards ten in the morning while John and I waited on the Cob the Surveyor of Customs for Seatown, who lived at Chideock, came riding post-haste into Lyme with the news that a ten-oared boat had put out from one of the three ships before dawn and left two strangers on shore. After feasting the Chideock fishermen with canary wine and cold sheep's tongues and teasing them with talk of a rebellion in Ireland and another nearer home, the strangers had made off over the hills in the direction of Hawkchurch.

Leaving John behind on the Cob, I ran back to the house at once with the news. My uncle was in our long parlour room furbishing up his great basket-hilted sword. Never used since the Battle of Worcester it had waited patiently, I thought, until now, slung between two brass hooks over our high mantel-shelf. I had been aware of it ever since I could remember and never once thought until now that it was meant to maim and kill. I looked down at the naked blade and saw in miniature on the shining steel only the reflection of my own face, ugly and changed like a face convulsed with weeping. For a moment I could not speak.

My uncle encouraged me: "Well, Deborah?"

With an effort I told him all there was to tell. "Mayor Gregory Alford," I finished, "has sent a posse of constables after the two strangers with orders to bring them in."

"He is as likely to reach the moon as to catch them," my uncle said. With that he jammed his broad-brimmed hat more firmly upon his head and went out.

So my uncle knew who the strangers were, I thought. Not too closely I prepared to follow him.

My Aunt Margaret called to me from the kitchen as I came down the stairs: "Oliver Bland is here."

Again, I thought, my heart lifting a little. I went in. A barrister by profession, Oliver had taken to staying with us pretty often of late on his way back from Exeter, where his widowed mother lived, to London and the Inns of Court.

"Does he come on your account, Deborah," my aunt asked

crisply after one look at me, "or on John's?"

I answered her truthfully. "I am not certain why he comes. He knows that I am to be promised to John." I began to move away. "Though John does not want me," I said. "I am certain of that. No, nor need me either." I spoke cheerfully.

"John does not know what he wants, or needs," my aunt said in vexed tones.

"Will he ever know?" I asked airily.

My aunt, who was rubbing fat into flour for the meat pasties for my name-day feast that same evening, dusted the flour from her hands and looked at me very directly. "Do *you* know what you want, Deborah?"

"I think I am beginning to know," I said.

She straightened. "What does that mean?"

"I wish I might be free to choose for myself," I said. "I would like to choose for myself whom I might marry."

"I feared as much," my aunt said. She asked me, "Why must you speak of it now? Have we not enough trouble brewing? Perhaps the worst sort of trouble — everything points to it."

"Perhaps I feel I must speak now," I said, "while I can, before it is too late."

"Say no more now," my aunt said. "Leave this matter of your freedom. Like most things it will resolve itself."

Into no freedom, I thought. I did not speak.

My aunt thrust her white cap further back from her forehead, leaving two dabs of flour not unbecomingly upon her cheeks. She spoke abruptly: "Those ships in the Bay, Deborah, are they still there?"

"Yes." I nodded.

"Why do they not move on?" she asked. "Why?" She turned to me. "Oh, Deborah, I have lived through one Civil War. I cannot endure another."

I do not know what I can endure, I thought composedly.

"I cannot sleep for worrying," my aunt said. "Once your uncle had no secrets from me. But of late I cannot even guess his thoughts. And I am afraid, Deborah, of what may come. For the second time in my life I am afraid." She caught back her words. "Where is your uncle now?" she asked, turning away.

When I answered that he had gone out she appeared relieved.

"Since it is your name-day you may go out too," she said. "Go while you can. Take John with you." She smiled suddenly. "And Oliver Bland also, if you must."

I smiled back at her.

I said, "I think I must."

* * *

My cousin John and Oliver Bland and I paused on the headland above Lyme Bay to look at the ships again. Short and almost silver-fair, John held my uncle's perspective glass to his eyes.

The scalloped waves came in gently; the seagulls floated overhead against the blue. Below us, but well within sight on the Church cliffs, was the town Bowling Green. It was just past one of the clock and the Club match which was held every Thursday had already begun. We could hear the click of wood against wood on the smooth turf and the spectators' voices raised now and then in disappointment or applause. Mayor Gregory Alford was conspicuous among the spectators in his plumed hat and long-skirted coat of bottle green. Master Samuel Dassell, Deputy Searcher of the Lyme Customs, a little round-bellied man in a mouse-coloured coat, waited fussily beside him. Anthony Thorold, H.M. Collector of Customs, stood a little way off.

"What do you make of the three ships, John?" Oliver asked. "Are they Dutch or French?"

"Dutch, all three," John said. He held the perspective glass in one hand. "For that reason I wish they were elsewhere or that there were more of them."

"Surely it is not the Prince of Orange who is on board," I said. "He would not come to invade a kingdom with no more than three ships."

"You are right. Only His Grace of Monmouth would do that," Oliver said. "He would come as he promised us once with only his sword in his hand, trusting to his faithful cities of the West."

"These sprigs of royalty are all alike," John said. "Because we shout and wave when they appear they believe they have a right to our lives and all that we have."

"You speak sourly, John." Oliver laughed at him. "Have you turned Republican?"

"No," John said, somewhat short. "But I do distrust all governments and most Causes. I do hate to be deceived."

"All this world is a deceit," Oliver said, smiling. "Or so we are told. But what choice have we? We must follow the light where we see it."

"What light?" John looked at him. "Leading where?"

"To the truth perhaps," Oliver said, "the truth as we see it. Though we never see it plain. Perhaps in time to better things. If I did not think so I should cultivate my garden somewhere by the Thames and forget the world."

Would that not be best? Would it not? I thought quickly. For a second I wished I might be in that garden too.

"Before we go on to speak of gardens," John said, "and combine flowers with philosophy like my Lord Chancellor Bacon, though God knows he was hypocrite enough, before we go on, I say, tell me why the Duke of Monmouth, supposing it is the Duke who is out there in the Bay, should decide to come among us now. Who has persuaded him to do so? When last we heard of him he was in Gouda in Holland with the Lady Henrietta Wentworth, whom he calls his wife. She was ill of a consumption, it was said, and in need of him."

I interrupted him, for I had a great regard for the Lady Henrietta even at this time though I had never yet set eyes upon her. "However ill the Lady Henrietta might be," I declared staunchly, "she would not hinder him from doing what he wished."

"Why would she not?" Oliver looked amused.

"Does she not love him?" I asked, red-faced. "And has she not always cared greatly for the Cause and for Liberty?"

"The Duke was one thing," John said. "She has made him another. Women should not meddle in politics, nor turn lovers into leaders overnight."

"Do not rail, John," Oliver said, "and I do not think it was overnight."

"John will always rail when I speak," I said hotly.

"Deb always *knows*," John said, "and always contradicts. I

find it tiresome. But then," — he smiled not very pleasantly — "my father has encouraged her to talk of politics and affairs until she thinks she is a man."

"I would hate," I said, "to be a man."

"Faith," said John, "at times like these I do hate it too."

They laughed. I thought they laughed at me.

"What is it you both have in mind?" I said, vexed in my turn.

"What is it that you know and will not tell me?"

"We know nothing," Oliver said.

"You do half-know." I turned away. "I will leave you to your secrets."

Oliver came after me. "Do not go, Mistress Deborah. Or, if you must," he said quickly after one look at me, "tell us where we may find you."

"On the next headland." I gestured. "It is not far."

"Then we will wait." He drew back from me.

I nodded and left them. Through a blur of childish tears I could scarcely see.

It was clear to me at last that John had no more love for me than I had for him. No two people, it was plain, could be more ill-matched and yet, in order to please our elders, we must be betrothed, we must marry. And come in all likelihood, I thought, given John's temper and my own, to grief. To grief and quarrelling. For a second I stood still, my world that had seemed so safe that morning overturned.

I went on. I would not marry John, I resolved unhappily, I would not. As honestly as possible, I would contrive not to have him. But then, whom should I marry? Or rather, who would come forward to marry me? I was an orphan; I had no dowry. Marriages were made for dowries, I knew, they were not made for love. But sometimes — I had heard a song that used these self-same words — love would find out the way. It was possible, I thought. Only this morning while I was out upon the Cob a young Lieutenant of the King's Dragoons, splendid in scarlet and white among a host of drab-looking folk, had long and earnestly regarded me. King's man though he was, I remembered him. It was possible, I thought, but perhaps not probable. I would hope for it. Certainly I had no wish to remain unwed.

I sat down and leaned my head on my knees. I had come far enough. All Lyme was behind me; the sun shone on Gold Cap; the three ships were out of sight.

On my feet once more, I turned back. If the ships sailed into Lyme harbour, if the Duke of Monmouth were indeed on board, I realised in fresh alarm, only trouble and sorrow could follow for us everywhere in the rich counties of the West. The freedoms His Grace of Monmouth or the Prince of Orange himself might proclaim could be won from King James only at the price of rebellion and civil war. In any renewed struggle for liberty, my uncle, as an old Parliament man, and Oliver Bland as a member of the New Country Party, could not help but be involved. Even John, however unwilling he might be, would follow the Hawkesley fashion in these matters.

Three ships in the Bay, I thought, and all our lives might be transformed and changed. On that thought I took to my heels. At once a veritable hornet of fear pursued me. The wind that had freshened since I set out filled my skirts, I bent my head to it; the salt spray came at me like a fine scud of rain; silvered over by the wind, the green down slid past.

John broke off his talk as I drew near. "Deb will always run," he remarked tolerantly, "when she might just as well walk."

I paused to lay a hand to my side where my heart pounded as if it would burst.

"Why should I not run?" I began indignantly.

Oliver interrupted me. "You were like a little ship yourself, Mistress Deborah, coming over the down."

I looked at him and his eyes were warm.

"A ship bound for where?" I asked. My heart pounding for a different reason now, I looked away.

"For port, surely." John spoke jealously.

"I would rather," I said, though it was not true then or afterwards, "I would rather go adventuring."

There was a harshness in John's voice when he spoke again. "If His Grace of Monmouth comes now he forces all our hands. We must support him or betray him. Could he not wait?"

"Until we have no law?" Oliver said. "And no Parliament worthy of the name? And no liberty?"

"Even King James," John said, "could not contrive to destroy so much so quickly."

"His work," Oliver said quietly, "is half done for him already. The Judges are his mouthpieces. They twist the law to his liking; they condemn whom he pleases. The King's Jesuit confessor, Father Edward Petre, is in the Cabinet where the law forbids him to be. There he rules the King and will soon rule the kingdom. The army is small as yet. But it grows daily. Commanded by Louis Durras, my Lord Feversham, a Frenchman, it is officered to an increasing extent by Roman Catholic Irish, once more against the law. In this manner the army has become the King's private weapon, to be used against Parliament or people, as he pleases. King James may even yet carry out those clauses of the Treaty of Dover which his brother, the late King Charles, concealed from Parliament so shamefully."

John pooh-poohed the notion. "The clauses are as dead as mutton. In fact I have forgotten them."

"I have not," Oliver said. "They stick in my gullet even if you have swallowed them. That we turn Catholic, a French army over here to help us to do so; that the Church of England consents to be devoured by the Church of Rome, that we betray our Protestant allies, the Dutch, and fight alongside King Louis of France in order to push the French frontier to the Rhine and beyond. In short, that we who are English betray our allies and destroy ourselves."

"How you enjoy," John said, "your own self-righteousness."

"Not nearly so much," Oliver said, "as you and your objecting kind will enjoy the liberty we poor fools fight for, and probably die for too." He half turned away. "But I am being spiteful," he said as if he were talking to himself, "and I do hate to be spiteful."

"So it is the old story," John said loudly, "submit, or resist. What if resistance is useless?"

"It is never useless," Oliver said.

"Would you risk martyrdom?" John asked.

"No, I fear it," Oliver said. "I dream of it sometimes, and flee from it. And then, of course, it follows me."

"Why must you speak of martyrdom?" I asked. "Why? I cannot bear it."

They looked at each other.

"Martyrdom is only a word," John said.

"I think it is like no other word," I said, and felt myself trembling.

"Truly, Mistress Deborah," Oliver said gently, "truly we know nothing of the ships yet, nor who is in them."

We moved on down the steep path that led to the Church cliffs and the bowling green and the town again. Oliver walked beside me. As if he were sulking John kept a pace or two behind.

A horn sounded from one of the streets below. To a clatter of hooves on the cobblestones and an answering stir among the crowds on the bowling green and at the quayside we hurried down. As we did so the pleasant sound of wood against wood, continuous since we climbed the cliff, could no longer be heard. On the edge of the bowling green we paused. Spectators and players alike were crowding round Simon Noon whose business it was to bring the weekly newsletter to Lyme along with the post. Legs straddling, face on fire, Mayor Alford held the newsletter open before him, then dashed it to the ground. Regardless of all those who stood in his way, he made for his horse. Samuel Dassell and Anthony Thorold followed.

There were angry murmurs among the crowd as the three men thrust their way through and a sudden forward surge, checked almost as suddenly, then silence again. What now? We looked at each other, doubt and consternation crowding every other thought from our minds. And then we knew.

Unnoticed by us the three ships had weighed anchor. Hot on the news of their setting-out which Simon Noon had carried, sails set, the cross of St. George flying at each mainmast head, they were coming in.

STARS AND FAIRIES

I WAITED with John and Oliver while the crowd about us grew until it stretched from one end to the other of the shore. The tide appeared scarcely to move; as if they were part of the furnishing of some dream the three ships came in only slowly. By this time the report contained in Mayor Alford's *Newsletter* was on everyone's lips, that the ships had set sail from Amsterdam and that the Duke of Monmouth himself was on board. Clearly the mystery that had troubled us since daybreak was no longer a mystery: the Duke himself and his handful of followers were here to adventure their lives and ours also for a kingdom and a Cause.

The unthinking and fanatical among the townspeople appeared overjoyed; many more, good Protestants though they were, appeared deeply troubled. Rebellion was a word few of them cared for and many of them feared. Others still, faithful supporters of King James, showed every sign of anger and alarm. Mayor Alford and members of the Town Council betook themselves to a tavern to consider what should be done. Samuel Dassell and Anthony Thorold joined them together with Captain William Floyer of Chideock, a former military gentleman and a famous local strategist.

Towards sunset expectation reached fever-point. Mayor Alford returned. Pistol in hand, legs straddling, he stood like a public statue of himself upon the cliffs. Master Dassell, coat tails pinned up over his snow-white breeches — no-one knew why — bobbed about like a distracted rabbit, looking in vain for guns to fire and men to fire them and ammunition to put in the guns.

At last the ships' boats, small and dark on the shining surface of the sea, were to be seen putting out for shore. There appeared at first to be no more than four of them. The Customs boat which had been detained since morning was the first of the four to be seen, Master Thomas Tye, our Customs officer in the stern, arms folded as if he were resigned to the clutch of Fate. Three more boats followed, each one loaded to the gunwhale with armed men.

Not until the seven had grounded on the western side of the harbour did we dare to be certain. Then as last we knew. The tall figure seen through perspective glasses at the water's edge could be no other than the Duke, no other than his friends the brisk company of gentlemen crowding around him. Down on their knees they went to ask a blessing on their enterprise. On their feet once more, swords drawn, the green banner of the New Country Party carried before them, they pressed on over the cliffs to the Stile Path which led into Pound Street and thence into the town.

Part of a great throng of people, John and Oliver and I streamed out to meet them. While we did so Mayor Alford ordered the drums to beat, the guns to fire and the militia to form. But there were no gunners; the drums beat stirringly indeed but in the Duke's honour and only one militiaman, John Holloway, looking as lost as a lamb left behind at shearing time, attempted to form.

The wind freshened, the leaves that during the last half hour had hung as still as if there were a tempest in the air, lifted once more and a ripple of feeling, part release, part laughter, could be felt through the crowd. Cries of "A Monmouth, a Monmouth," "The Protestant Religion," could be heard, and the sound everywhere of running feet. As if this were the moment they had been waiting for the town band raced for their instruments while John Jackson, the town blacksmith, set off resourcefully with a small apprentice and a large hammer to break down the doors of the Town Hall which Mayor Alford had ordered to be barred against the Duke. The doors of the town gaol were thrown open and the prisoners, many of whom were Nonconformist ministers and members of their congregations, brought out once more into the light of day. Some wept on being released; others, as if they were unable to support the burden of so much joy, sat speechless and trembling by the wayside.

It had been close on five of the clock when the *Newsletter* arrived; it was almost eight when the Duke came in sight, walking a little ahead of his party, bareheaded, sword in hand, the gold Star of the Garter visible upon his purple velvet coat. Down the steep path that led into Lyme he came between the over-arching

trees and the wild rose hedges, the green banner of his Party spread out behind him, the brave motto 'Fear nothing but God,' blazoned upon it, a white stir of dust under his feet.

At sight of the foremost members of the crowd he sheathed his sword and came on. To all those who remembered him when he made his last Progress in the West five years ago he appeared greatly changed. The past two years of exile had left their mark upon him. He had been plump-cheeked and smiling as a girl when he came among us last; to-day, even I who was no more than twelve at that time, could not help but take note of the look of strain and weariness upon his face.

John and Oliver and I stood to one side while the crowd and the Duke's party met, while greetings were exchanged, introductions made and the Duke's hand kissed. For everyone, he had the right touch and the right word. Whatever else about him had changed with the years, here was the courtesy everyone remembered, the warmth of manner that could not help but kindle warmth again.

Oliver spoke softly. "Once more he will win all hearts."

"If hearts were enough," John said.

What else was needed? I thought. Men, money and horses, of course — the Duke had brought as far as we could see no more than eighty-three men with him — London to come over at once to his side and the Northern counties to follow. And besides that? Good weather and good fortune, I supposed; a fleet to hold the seas for him, and time. Time above all.

Isolated by our own doubts among so many smiles, we waited at the edge of the crowd for what we scarcely knew. The snake-like heads of the Woody Nightshade trails in the hedgerows, unopened yet, wove their strange patterns against the sky; the green banners waved. And still the greetings and the handshakes went on. Everywhere around us the names of volunteers were being jotted down. William Cox, who had charge of my uncle's team of twenty or more packhorses, was the first to come forward. His shock of fair hair appeared to stand on end, his ears burned, every freckle seemed on fire. A score or more of young men, just as eagerly, followed him.

The town band which had met the Duke's party struck up once more. To the strains of 'Young Jimmy is a fine young man,' the

procession moved off in the direction of the Market Square. It was already packed with people. They filled the balconies of the houses, they crowded the gardens, they stood four deep in the narrow streets. When Joseph Tyler, poet and merchant of Bristol, mounted the rough rostrum which had been set up in the centre of the Square and began to read the Duke's *Declaration* aloud I own I found it difficult to listen patiently. The accusations against King James and the Roman Catholics of having, among other things, set fire to the City of London and poisoned the late King Charles troubled me. They were past crediting. They had been inserted, we learned afterwards, by Robert Ferguson, the Scotsman, a noted plotter and habbler who had won the confidence of the Duke.

The Duke's aims, which the Declaration set forth, were more to everyone's taste. I had known them, it seemed to me, always. But to-day they were so hedged about with pompous phrases my mind took flight from them, my thoughts settled, butterfly-fashion, on the turquoise gown laced with yellow which I had chosen for my name-day gift from Jeremy Trump's shop in Exeter High Street. My imagination dwelt pleasurably for a while on the clocked hose of yellow silk which my uncle had brought back for me from Lyons in France, and the satin stays I was determined to lace mercilessly tight. I wished my aunt would allow me, now that I was turned seventeen, to thread blue ribbons (after the fashion Mistress Nelly Gwynne had set) in my nightgowns. But she would not. Blue ribbons were a temptation, I knew. A temptation to what? I thought wickedly — and a nightgown in my aunt's opinion should never be more than a covering.

With a start I brought myself back to Lyme and the Market Square and Master Tyler's face. The sun's rays, gentle and almost spent, shone on us all, on the flowers in the many gardens, on the grey roofs and the small painted houses. A thin crescent moon hung in the eastern sky, all Lyme seemed held in a faint haze of golden light. There appeared to be no shadows; there was no sound except the splash of the waves and the sound of Master Tyler's voice.

I listened and gradually my mind, wandering before, kept pace

with his; the words he spoke carried their message to my brain. His was a poet's voice able to give weight and meaning beyond anything they might normally possess to very ordinary words. When he spoke of the miseries we had endured in the West where the laws passed in King Charles the Second's time against Nonconformists had been so cruelly enforced, I remembered my own father and others like him, Nonconformist ministers and members of their congregations whose lives had rotted away most hideously in gaol. When Master Tyler declared it to be our duty to take up arms for our religion and our liberty I, also, grew resolved. Light-minded and irreverent though I was, the resolve I came to then stayed with me until the end.

As though of their own accord my eyes sought Oliver's eyes. His gaze passed over me; his resolve, a touch of exaltation added to it which I could not share, was written most clearly upon his face.

The words Tyler spoke finally were part of the Duke's *Declaration*, yet he spoke them as if they were his own: "Our trust is upon the Lord. Now let us play the man for our people . . . and the Lord do that which seemeth good unto Him."

The crowd stirred for answer. The movement, scarcely perceptible at first, gathered strength and spread until it swayed us all. I shivered and hardly knew why I did so, unless it was that I felt all eternity about me for a moment and myself so small.

His work done for this evening, Tyler moved away.

I would have preferred my own company for a while but John would have me come with Oliver and himself to the Church Cliffs where the Duke had set up his colours, and where the enrolment of volunteers was continuing.

Already a long queue had formed and the two Writers sitting at two separate drumheads were busily taking down names by lantern light. The banners — a second, inscribed *For Parliament and the Protestant Religion*, had been added to the first — hung limply: the Duke in a long velvet cloak stood beside one of them: my Lord Grey, his small ferret-like face lost in a vast feathered hat, was posted beside the other.

We had scarcely arrived when Oliver introduced a short, stiffly-built young man to us: "Christopher Battiscombe," said he,

"lately of Dorset and London, the Duke's Ambassador to the West."

Puzzled for a second, I gazed at Master Battiscombe. Smilingly he gazed back at me.

"Surely, sir," I said, at last, **"surely you were in Lyme some weeks back. Were you not one of my uncle's pack-horse men for a while?"**

"But I did not travel in Exeter serges, Mistress Hawkesley," he said, and laughed at me.

At this point the two Hewling brothers joined us. I had already heard of them. William was a little older than I was; Benjamin, I believe, at that time was no more than twenty-two. Grandsons of Alderman William Kyffen of the City of London, they had followed the Duke into exile and returned with him, Benjamin as a Captain of the Duke's Horse, William as a Lieutenant in one of the Duke's Regiments of Foot. Fair-haired and blue-eyed, they appeared to me as handsome as young gods and more smiling. All Lyme and all Taunton were to remember them.

While I stayed tongue-tied and silent Benjamin Hewling teased me. Did I still play at quarter-staves? And was I famous even now at fisticuffs?

I defended myself valiantly. I had never engaged in fisticuffs, I declared. But then, quite suddenly, the talk moved away from me as I might have known it would and the young men became deeply involved in matters of strategy and tactics.

The western counties must serve at the Duke's recruiting ground, the Hewlings said. Taunton Dene alone could supply half the men the Duke needed. From Lyme he would move against Exeter or against the great port of Bristol itself. Exeter or Bristol in his hands, he would strike through Gloucester to Cheshire where my Lord Delamere and the northern lords were waiting. Together they would move on London where the City, everyone was confident, would declare for them.

But first, Christopher Battiscombe insisted, the Duke must form his army and train it for war. This should not be difficult. King James could command no more than four thousand Regulars; the Duke could enlist twice that number of Volunteers. As for the three English regiments stationed in Holland and loaned

to the Prince of Orange, they would remain where they were — the Prince of Orange could be relied upon not to embarrass the Duke by returning them.

John was not convinced. "How can you be so confident?" he asked. "Why should the Prince of Orange, King James's rightful heir, do anything to make the Duke of Monmouth king?"

Christopher Battiscombe turned wooden. "The Duke has every confidence in the Prince," he said stiffly.

"The Duke has every confidence in everyone," Benjamin Hewling said.

Arms linked, as smiling as if this matter of the Duke's trust in the Prince of Orange were only one more hazard they must face, the two Hewling brothers moved away, taking Christopher Battiscombe with them. Oliver followed.

I looked after him.

One hand on my elbow, John teased me now. "Art in love with Oliver?"

"With no-one." I shook off his hand. "Why must you speak so discouragingly to Christopher Battiscombe just now?"

"Why not?" John said. "I have no faith in any of their plans if the truth be told. No, nor in the Duke of Monmouth either."

"Sometimes I think you have no faith in anything," I said.

"I have no need of faith or no faith," John said. "Everything is decided for me in advance. Would you not agree?" He was smiling as he spoke.

"You have our betrothal in mind." I spoke quickly.

"That among other things." He nodded.

"What would you do," I asked quickly again, "if you were free to choose?"

"I have never thought of it." He swung a hand. "I might have my own ship, I suppose, and go voyaging in her for two years or more, and escape these turmoils and the warehousing."

"You would escape me also." I looked at him.

He bent towards me. "Truly, Deborah, you and I might do well enough together after a while."

"After a while," I said. "And is that all?"

He appeared surprised. "What more do you want?"

"A great deal more," I said.

"So suddenly?"

"I have felt like this for some time," I said. "I have felt that we should not be happy together. That we are too different ever to agree."

He was silent. It was a considering sort of silence, I felt.

"I am part of all that you dislike," I continued, hurrying on, "part of the woollen trade and the warehousing and my uncle's politics. Part also of the life you lead in Lyme which you feel is too narrow a life for you." I paused.

He turned to me. "Well, do not let us be betrothed — yet. I am not ready for it. Neither, it is plain, are you. Besides — this is no time for betrothals, or marrying. That could be our excuse."

I spoke hotly. "Do not let us offer any excuses. I do hate excuses. Let us say simply that we do not wish to be betrothed."

"If you prefer it that way we will say just that." John took my hand, held it for a moment, then dropped it again. "I do not like excuses either. But do not marry anyone else. I should dislike that."

"Even you," I declared in fresh exasperation, "even you cannot have it both ways."

"But I do always want it," he declared, "both ways. I would never willingly give up, as you know, what is mine." He swung a hand. "And you have always been reckoned as mine."

"That is over," I said. "We are free."

"Whatever that may mean," he said.

"Free of each other," I said. "Free, if we wish, to choose differently." We paused outside my Uncle Edmund's door. I put a hand on John's arm. "Will you speak to them now?"

He looked down on me, his face in shadow. "Why not later?"

"I would rather you spoke now," I said.

With one of his sudden changes of moods he turned from me.

"If you insist," he said.

* * *

Close on ten of the clock that same evening I waited in our long parlour room for the company my uncle was bringing in from the *George Inn* to arrive and the feast, which my aunt and Gramercy, our maid, had prepared, to begin.

Through the tall windows of grey glass I could see a pale stir of flowers in the garden beds; above them, swinging low to-night, hung the stars. Under my feet by our hearth of wrought stone, under the polished boards and the Turkey rugs on the floor my uncle's cellars lay. Cavernous and damp and dark, you could reach them if you wished through a small trap door set in the floor in front of our stone hearth. Seldom used, the door led by a winding stair and a small dark tunnel to the shore. If you listened as I listened now, you could hear the scouring sound on the pebbles of the incoming tide: on winter nights when the seas ran high you could feel the house tremble to their buffeting.

To-night the seas were quiet, the waves came in softly. The quietness about me and the sense I had of events to come in the next few days pressed unbearably upon me. I moved, and was aware as I did so of the agitated beating of my own heart. And suddenly — it was a new thing for me — I felt myself alone as I had never yet been alone. For a second, like someone caught in the dark in the twist of a strange stair, I was unreasonably afraid.

Instinctively I turned towards the centre of the room where there were fewer shadows and the candles in their branched candlesticks burned clear. As I did so my Uncle Edmund, holding his great bulk stiffly as he always did, came in. He was six feet tall and a fine figure of a man still. His hair, shining and reddish-fair, touched the white collar of his broadcloth coat; he carried his plain-banded hat under one arm; his sword hung by his side. I came gladly to meet him, for I never had any fear of what he would say. We had understood one another from the beginning; in all that is important in mind and feeling, in some strange way I do not pretend to understand, we were the same.

"So there is to be no betrothal now or later," he said. "Is this John's doing, Deborah, or yours?"

"We are agreed upon it," I said.

He looked at me. His cheeks were as though washed with grey; his eyes that were bluer than any sea showed ringed and tired.

"You would lie to me a little in this, I think," at last he said, "for John's sake."

"Truly," I said again, "we are agreed."

"I wish it were only a postponement," he said. "But it is not?"

"Forgive me." I spoke humbly.

"I desired this marriage between you and John," he went on, "for your sake more than his, that you might be certain of a home always. I desired it, if I tell the truth, for this reason also, that I might have a grandson from you both after my own liking. Your spirit matches mine, Deborah," he said. "You and I know that, while John, though I love him well, is one of those who make a religion of no belief."

"It is I who have disappointed you," I said.

"Then it was your doing, mostly." He waited.

I clung to him and did not speak. "Would you have young Bland then?" he asked.

I raised my head. "He has not spoken to me."

"He may do so," my uncle said. "A man makes up his mind quickly in times like these. I suppose he feels Time's hurrying feet." He smiled as he spoke. "I feel them too."

"And I," I said.

"You may have your way in this matter of the betrothal, Deborah," he said. "For I had mine." One hand of his stroked my hair. "You have been a good daughter to me, always. Now I want you to be something of a son to me also. It is a lot to ask."

"I would do anything for you," I said, "anything." Like a child looking for comfort, both hands on the lapels of his coat, I burrowed in.

"I would not burden you," he said steadily, "but John will come with me, and your aunt has no head for affairs."

"You will go with the Duke then?" I asked.

"I have been with him this long while," he said. "There is no perfection in leaders, Deborah. A man must stand by his beliefs and take in the way of leaders what comes. I would not have chosen the Duke of Monmouth, no, nor any member of his family either, with the exception of the Prince of Orange. But that is neither here nor there."

As if he had said too much he went on to speak at once of what I must do, if he should not return. If affairs went badly

with the Duke's Cause I must trust only in Captain Julian and in myself.

I said quickly, for even then I had no great love for Captain Julian, "I will trust in myself."

At that my uncle laughed. "Do not think yourself braver than you are, Deborah. For that also is a snare."

He went on to speak of the store of gold coins that he would leave with me for my aunt and Dinah and myself, and of Starvecrow farm that he said was mine, poor place though it was, and of the papers that would prove my possession of it if proof were needed. He told me where I might find other more valuable documents also that had to do with the warehouse and his stock of woollen goods, and any bills of exchange that were due to him, to all of which I listened with a bursting heart.

When at last I wept from the dread I had of losing him and the intolerable burden of it all he untied his kerchief of Monmouth green from about his arm and dried my eyes, and comforted me: "It will not always be so. This, too, will pass."

"When?" I asked.

"You must wait for it," he said, "and" — he smiled at me — "work for it also."

He left the kerchief with me. "Keep it until I claim it," he said.

I kept it and have it still.

* * *

He and I stood side by side while the company, treading on each other's heels like a herd of steers, came crowding in.

Before long I grew tired from so much curtseying. Colonel Abraham Holmes and Colonel Venner, both of them old friends of my uncle and former members of General Cromwell's New Model Army, were presented to me. The younger men whom the Duke had drawn to himself were not absent. I met Colonel Wade, afterwards of such doubtful fame, and a host more whose names elude me now. William Williams, the Duke's Welsh steward, had the Dutch Master Gunner, Mynheer Buyse, by the arm. Both were merry. The Welshman was attempting to sing a Psalm while the Dutchman bawled a drinking song from Rotterdam. Robert

Marshall, the late Sir Thomas Armstrong's squire, who had served the Duke since Sir Thomas was hanged and quartered in the late King Charles's time, followed. His hair, for he wore no wig, grew straight and square about his brow, his eyes under curiously indeterminate eyebrows did not smile; his mouth turned down most obstinately. I never beheld, I thought then, though I was to change my mind later, so dour a face.

I looked for Colonel Richard Rumbold whose name, as I have said, I remembered from my earliest days, and could not find him. I wished I might meet Heywood Dare, the Taunton goldsmith. He was Paymaster of the Duke's Forces and a man greatly loved and respected throughout the West. Colonel Rumbold was in Scotland, I was told, with the Marquis of Argyll, while Heywood Dare had not yet returned from his errand to Mr George Speke at Whitelackington House.

We waited while the company continued to come in. At last every seat at the long trestle tables that lined the room was filled. At this distance of time I remember the small things best: the stale perfume of violets the Duke's Welsh steward left behind when he kissed my hand, the tiny holes stray bursts of gunpowder had left on the Dutch Master Gunner's brow, and Robert Marshall's back, most resolutely turned on me, dourer and more uncompromising even than his face.

When the meal was ready and everyone in his place Gramercy and I went about filling empty cups and plates while my uncle and John carved at the side table, and the company and the room also grew warm.

There was such a scraping of feet towards the end, all the gentlemen standing up as my aunt, free of her duties at last, came in on my uncle's arm. When there was no wealth left to the Hawkesleys and nothing remained to them of what had once been theirs, when indeed the three of us that were left had hard work to live, I liked to remember how my Aunt Margaret looked then in her moss-green gown, her dark hair with the red gleams piled high after the new fashion, a necklace of yellow topaz stones set in a filigree of gold and twisted work of Heywood Dare's own making about her neck. I remember how gracious and proud she seemed, her look marvellously clear as my uncle bent towards

her, the great love he had for her apparent in his eyes and in the gentleness upon his face.

More moved than I wished to be in that moment I looked away, and was aware of Oliver Bland. He stood in the doorway, his eyes on me, a small deepening smile about his lips. I know that I changed colour and that I did not cease while the meal dragged on to be aware of him.

My aunt laid a hand on my arm as she passed. "Do not put John for ever out of your mind, Deborah."

John, who was following close behind her, brushed against me. "How fine we are to-night," he said, whispering. "Shall I change my mind?"

"Do not. I am quite reconciled," I said.

For the rest of the time I moved as though separately from myself. Absently I served one or two latecomers, absently I helped Gramercy and Jasper clear the trestle tables and carry dishes and plates away.

In response to whispered messages from Christopher Battiscombe the gentlemen left, a dozen or more at a time, for their rendezvous with the Duke and his officers at *The George*. The room emptied at last. I left Gramercy; I made my way outside. The summer night that had been so long in coming was here at last, only a little darker than the day. Gradually the noises of Lyme, the tread of feet, the voices, the trundle of cart wheels and the dull thuds from the beach as the unloading of the three ships went on fell away.

How long I waited by our summerhouse at the garden's end I do not know, but presently again Oliver came in search of me as I had half known he would.

He stood beside me at first as if he were content merely to be there. But then, simple and direct as always, he said, "Since you are not to be betrothed to John, Mistress Deborah, may I not ask for you?"

From the happiness I felt all at once I could find no words with which to answer. Then, remembering how much had changed for us since that same morning, I asked him, "Will you not feel differently to-morrow?"

"Neither to-morrow, nor any other day," he said.

He drew nearer me. "I love you, Mistress Deborah. I shall not change. A little while ago my mind was full of other things. I thought that love could wait. But now all this has changed. Time presses so hard on us I dare not wait. Now my mind is clear. Now I know there is no night for me, no doubt nor darkness, it is all alike pure day if you are there." He paused. "Tell me," he said, "if you will, how it is with you."

"By my life it is no different," I said.

I cannot tell how long we stayed together nor what we said. I know that I was more moved than I had ever thought to be and more content. The sea silvered, the night grew scented and still. A moth brushed my face; I started in alarm and from a little distance on the other side of our long parlour windows my aunt called to me: "Deborah. Deborah."

"Should you not go?" Oliver took his arms from me.

"Not yet," I begged him. "I pray you, do not leave me yet." For he would go, I knew, where my love could not follow him, nor my heart know.

My aunt called a second time, more urgently.

"Will you wait for me," Oliver asked, "until there is peace again?"

"Always," I promised him, "always."

But who knows how long always is, I thought, or what chance will do?

So we parted. I heard his step springing and light for a moment on the loose stones of the path, soft on the turf. I heard the wicket gate click to behind him at the garden's end. Then the night swallowed him as it was to swallow him many times more when we met and parted, and he was gone.

For a moment I stayed where I was. The sky turned opal-coloured, a fine mist floated more smoothly than any gull over the cliff face and my aunt called again.

Unwillingly I went in. Lighted candle in hand, she greeted me from somewhere near the centre of the room. "What has happened to you? Where have you been?"

"Not far," I said. Really I had been to my world's end, I thought, if that were far.

"Your uncle and John are at *The George* with the Duke still,"

she said. "Deborah, what will come of this? Has all the world gone mad?"

I took the lighted candle from her hand and straightened the candle wick so that the flame sparked once, then burned clear. "Not all the world," at last I said.

"Why must our men go?" she asked, almost whispering. "Why? When they have everything to lose?"

My eyes on the candle flame, I answered her. "Men must be free. It has always been so. Do not ask me why."

"Men deceive themselves," she said. "They have always deceived themselves. Are we not all bound, by duty, by loyalty . . . ?"

I took my eyes from the candle flame. "In their place I would go too."

My aunt withdrew as it were from me. "You also," she said, "you also have turned fanatical. But you were always so, from the beginning." Her hands covered her face, then fell away. "I hoped never to see another rebellion. And it is here."

"Yes," I said. I wished I might comfort her and myself. But there was no comfort to give.

Slowly, and unwillingly again, I moved away. The shadows were all about me like presences as I climbed the stairs. Beyond the small beam of light my candle made I could sense the dark, and that, too, seemed tecming and alive. The skies, seen through our one staircase window, were filled with milky light and patterned thick with stars.

My cousin Dimity rocked in her cradle overhead, then called to me sleepily as I drew near her door.

Straightening the coverlet, I bent over her.

"Are all the stars and fairies out?" she asked.

"Truly," I said and kissed her, "truly, I think they are."

DOUBTING CASTLE

IT WAS the fourteenth of June. Ever since Oliver had left me I had been restless and dissatisfied. To-day the walls of the house were like a prison about me; I longed to be anywhere but where I was. Since the night of the Duke's landing my aunt had kept me constantly at her side; I felt she watched me secretly; I knew, though nothing was said, that I was in disgrace.

This afternoon, seated not far from her in our kitchen window, I must busy myself with my Turkey work, a warning sermon in coloured wools. On one half the first King Charles went hunting the stag on a Sunday; on the other King Belshazzar was starting up in alarm from his happy feasting at sight of the well-known writing on the wall.

I was no needlewoman and my heart was never in sermons. I let my hands rest on my lap; I closed my eyes. My ears, like the narrow garden outside that fronted the street, were filled with the sleepy drone of my uncle's honey bees.

My aunt's voice reproached me. "Deborah, you waste your time."

I went on with my work. My uncle's clock on our first landing which Master Tompion had made struck three, and the Welsh pedlarwoman whom my aunt was expecting came knocking at our kitchen door. We knew her well. Under the tray of lawful wares in her basket fresh river trout, poached from some neighbouring stream, lay neatly wrapped in fennel and sorrel leaves.

Gramercy opened to her. I got up hastily from my seat as the Welshwoman entered; I left my aunt and Gramercy to their bargaining.

John joined me presently in the green arbour of box next to the summerhouse at the garden's end. His smile meant nothing, I knew. He wore it to hide whatever he felt in the way of disappointment or hurt.

He sat beside me and looked first at his outspread hands and then at me.

"I did not reckon," he said, "when I set you free that Oliver Bland would step so quickly into my place."

"He did not reckon on it either," I said. "Neither, God is my witness, did I."

"It happened," John said.

"Who would marry you, Deborah," he asked, "if Oliver should fail you?"

"He will not fail me," I said.

"He will sacrifice himself and you also," John said, "to this dream of his, of Liberty and the Cause. I tell you this passion between you cannot last."

"Who can tell," I asked, "now that Civil War is here what will last?"

"True," John said. "Even I am on my way to be a burnt offering."

He half turned towards me. "I have joined Wade's Regiment, the Blue."

"To please your father," I said.

"To please one half of myself also," John said.

"What regiment has Oliver joined?" I asked.

"So we come back to him." John got to his feet. "He has become a member of the Duke's own bodyguard, where he will be most privileged and most in danger. And you, Mistress Deborah, are to be conducted to Taunton as soon as may be to Mistress Blake's *Academy for Young Ladies* to keep you from him."

"Nothing will keep me from him," I said.

"I will keep you from him if I can," John said. "See if I do not. For he has moved too fast."

Then I must move fast too, I thought unrepentantly.

It was at this point that the pistol shot, which was to shatter much more than the peace of Lyme, rang out. John started off towards the house; I followed him. As we ran we could hear the sound of other running feet. Framed in the open doorway of our kitchen, half the inhabitants of Broad Street were rushing past — stout citizens, broadcloth jackets flying; young matrons dragging small children by the hand; a crazed beldame in a nightgown; a cripple swinging gleefully along between two sticks.

I moved to the open doorway and Gramercy came in. She hung up her cloak; she re-tied her apron strings, all very deliberately. "Fletcher of Saltoun," she announced, "that other troublesome Scotsman, has shot and killed our Major Heywood Dare."

The Welshwomen, who had not stirred from her chair, shot up both hands.

"It was told me," she declared, "I dreamed it also — 'Between one pistol shot and another the Duke's Cause shall go down.' "

"Oh, these prophesyings!" John pushed past us in disgust and went out into the street.

I sought for my aunt and found her in the little upstairs room she called her own. It held her virginals and her writing tablets and the few books she prized. Master John Donne's *Works* were among them, shining softly in brown vellum and gold, and a copy of a most worshipful book on the death of King Charles the First, bound in mourning black and entitled *Eikon Basilike*.

Her face whitened when I told her what I knew. "It is the first killing," she said. "I wish it might be the last."

I thought of the many hundreds of West Country folk who had loved and trusted Heywood Dare who now, for lack of him, might hold aloof from the Duke's Cause. It was possible, I thought again, remembering something of all the talk I had heard, it was possible that my Lord Grey, whom only a few of our people liked or trusted, would be appointed now in Heywood Dare's place to command the Duke's Regiments of Horse. All this flashed through my mind and went again.

My own affairs came uppermost now. The table between us, I faced my aunt. "Why," I asked, "are you sending me to Taunton?"

"You know why," my aunt replied. "But, Deborah, I pray you, do not trouble me now."

I looked at her without pity and without love. I took note of the grey eyes that looked back at me, clearer and more sparkling than any glass, and the long curving mouth that was a shade too thin, that trembled like a child's when she was hurt, that trembled now.

I said, "I have a right to speak."

She pleaded with me. "It is for your good, Deborah, surely you must see that."

"Everything you do is for my good, always," I said. "Especially when it is not to my liking."

I left her then. From that time I think my aunt's mind hardened against me; from that time — how could it be otherwise? — we grew even further apart.

I had resolved to shed no tears when the time came two mornings afterwards to say goodbye. And yet I wept, that I must be parted from them all at this time and that I should be so deeply in disgrace.

Jasper Dean, our man-servant, rode ahead of me, wrapped like the morning in a sad-coloured cloak. It was a miserable setting out, I felt, for there was nothing to be seen but the mists, nothing more cheerful to be felt than a cold dabble of tears on my cheeks. But gradually the sun brightened; the mists, as they invariably do, dissolved. Once more I took pleasure in what I saw — the dewdrops spangling the tall hedges, the sun thrusting up on golden stilts of light. I laughed secretly at last at the spectacle Jasper made, an ancient sword which Gramercy had girded upon him out of mockery sticking out at least a yard on his right side, while Jasper himself, who was nothing of a warrior, crouched like a hungry friar upon his horse.

I called out to him: "Why do you carry your sword so much behind you, Jasper?"

"Because I do hate the sight of it," he said.

At that I laughed outright and for the rest of this day shed no more tears. I began instead to take some comfort to myself that my gaoler at Taunton should be no other than Mary Blake, my old school-fellow. It was fortunate indeed, I told myself, that she, and not her aunt, old Mistress Blake, should be in charge of the *Academy of Young Ladies* where I had been at school, whither once more, as if time turned backwards for me, I was bound.

I remembered the white balcony with the brass knobs that looked down on Taunton's East Street, and the moving network of shadows the leaves of the vine that overhung the balcony

made all day in summer on the white walls and the school-room floor. I could see the red plums again, and taste them too, each of them with a sour purplish swelling at the tip, that in late summer dropped so temptingly on the hard-baked earth, and the sunflowers that looked down on us, kindly and stiff as old Mistress Blake herself, from the enclosing wall.

As we rode on I wondered if Mary Blake had changed in the two years since we met. Was she still as slim as she had been then and as shapely too? Was her hair still as straight and fine and silver-fair? She would never be one, I was certain, for tight-lacing or curling tongs. Like Oliver — here I thought of him again — she had a mind tuned to higher and better things. From the beginning of our school-days we had shared the same pew in chapel and the same Holy Book. During Master Alleyn's sermons we would read the Song of Solomon together or the Book of Proverbs. "Love is stronger than Death," we would read, and "Jealousy is as cruel as the Grave," and again, "Many waters cannot quench Love, nor can the Seas of Life drown it."

"The Seas of Life," I would think and for a second, no longer, my mind would be lost in the words. Only afterwards, long afterwards, did the sense they conveyed come home to me of drowning waters and depths and tides unknown, carrying me where?

To-day, with the mists lifting and the road to Taunton and beyond opening out before me, I did no more than remember them.

Thrusting my hood off my face, I called to Jasper again: "Jasper, who was Gramercy's lover that left her with a child that died?"

"Died, did it?" Jasper murmured, half-asleep. "Now I thought 'twas smothered." He rubbed his eyes. "My Clarice says 'twas a travelling packman, Gramercy swears 'twas a highwayman. It could ha' been both," Jasper said and yawned. "Seemin'ly."

"What do you mean by seemingly, Jasper?" I said.

I was never answered. Sudden as a bird, a rider came flying on his bay mare over the hedge on our left and landed with a sputter of turves almost at our horses' feet. He carried a pistol in one hand; he wore a black velvet mask.

Jasper tugged valiantly at his great sword. "D'arse it," he swore. "I knew it. Her wun't stir."

Our highwayman, for that is what he appeared to be, rode round us.

He addressed Jasper. "A fine sword, sir, a very fine sword. I'll swear it last let blood at Agincourt in Harry the Fifth's time."

He turned to me. "I do regret, mistress," he said, "I must have your purse."

"There's little enough in it, sir." I gave him my purse.

"I'd not take it," he said and looked inside. "But faith, lady, a man must eat."

"If you are hungry, sir," I said on a sudden thought, "could you not share our meal and restore my purse?"

"I will then," said he. "With all my heart." He tossed my purse somewhat impudently, I thought, at Jasper's feet.

Jasper let it lie. He was my uncle's man-servant. it is true, but he was no man's slave.

While our brigand was eating half the sucking pig we had brought with us and more than half my aunt's apricot pie he talked gaily, between vast mouthfuls, of himself. He was for Taunton, he said, where His Grace of Monmouth was expected any time now.

"When, sir?" I said. "When is the Duke expected?" If the Duke came to Taunton Oliver would accompany him, I knew.

He threw away a crust and bent to me. "Why, mistress," he said, "are you for Taunton also? And for His Grace?" He doffed his feathered hat. "God bless His Grace. God bless us all." He put on his hat, settling it neatly with long brown fingers over his mask. "As for when the Duke will be there I cannot say for certain. But it will be soon, mistress, soon." With a flourish he turned his horse. Once more his bay mare leapt the hedge. Almost at once mare and rider were gone.

Jasper comforted me and himself. "I did keep, mistress," he said, "the two little hams for us."

I retrieved my own purse; we ate the two little hams and what remained of the apricot pie; we drank my aunt's plum wine and grew merrier than I had ever thought to be on this journey. Warmed by the wine, Jasper sang. From ballads he proceeded to

hymns; from hymns he progressed even more happily to psalms. His psalm-singing, I am certain now, was our undoing and the source, as you will agree, of half the troubles I was to encounter in the next three years and half the temptations also.

The road we followed, though narrow, was wide enough to allow a wheeled vehicle to pass, and yet the maroon-coloured coach that bore down on us so suddenly must thrust us unkindly into the ditch. I caught no more than a glimpse of the squat coachman in maroon-coloured livery upon the box and his fine periwigged passenger within. The coachman was leaning forward, whip raised; the fine gentleman within the coach was leaning forward too. They were on us in the crack of a whip. In the next instant my horse was fetlock-deep in water while the coach rolled on.

I looked round for Jasper. Legs sprawled, both arms flung wide, his great sword half under him, he lay where he had fallen among the pink clovers and the brown bumblebees. Though I spoke to him I could not make him hear. I looked around me in something like despair and was immediately overjoyed. Our two horses were unconcernedly cropping the clover and the sweet grasses a little way off, while the coach that had overturned us had itself come to grief. Not a hundred yards away where the road swerved sharply left, it leaned dangerously to one side, axle-deep in the same dyke. The coachman was struggling to free the horses; the fine gentleman I had glimpsed within was pacing up and down, most furiously it seemed, in the muddy road.

My riding habit held in both hands, I made towards him. He halted as I drew near. His eyes and his wig were grey. But the skin about his eyes showed puffed and pouched and turkey-red.

I accused him breathlessly. "Sir, you have driven my man and me into the ditch."

One eyebrow raised, he waited.

I cried out to him a second time. "My man has been knocked senseless, sir. Now help me move him if you will."

"And if I will not?" Hands linked behind his back, he advanced on me. Though I quailed inwardly I stood my ground.

"My man is two yards high," I said. "I cannot move him. Will you not aid me, sir?"

"On that note, mistress," he said, snorting a little, "we may talk."

The skirts of his coat raised, for the grass was rank and high, he led off towards Jasper while I followed.

I accused him again, this time to his back. "You drove us into the ditch for no reason, sir."

He halted in his tracks, then turned. "I do nothing without good reason, mistress."

Silenced but persisting still, I stumbled after him.

He looked down at Jasper for a second, then stooped and heaved him up and dropped him down again in another place. All this he did as easily as if he himself were a large grey elephant and poor Jasper a trunk of a tree two yards tall. The pink clovers were crushed where Jasper had been lying; the bumblebees, I remember, made a great huff at being disturbed, and Jasper, showing the whites of his eyes for a moment when he struck earth once more, uttered a ghastly groan.

My gentleman tapped me sharply upon one arm. "Your man is shamming, mistress, the canting, psalm-singing rogue."

He lumbered off at that, only to return after a pace or two. Where was I bound? he wished to know.

"For Taunton, sir," I said. "Does not the road wind that way?"

"Ay, and to a host more places, Mistress Malapert," he replied. A glint of something more dangerous than humour in his eyes, he came nearer me. "What might you be doing in that nest of traitors?" he enquired.

I drew off from him. "How if I do not choose to tell you, sir?"

Both hands on my shoulders, he shook me once, then tossed me from him. "My little pretty fool, I shall discover it," he said.

* * *

With the help of what remained of the plum wine and some dirty water from the ditch and a few thumps upon his back, which I delivered savagely just to make amends to myself, I suppose, for my own rage and hurt, Jasper recovered more rapidly than I had at first thought possible. Well, he had a hard head, I thought, and a thick one also, both very valuable in these disturbed days.

We came into Taunton at the end of the day when the wind's edge turns cold. Mary Blake, who had been watching from her balcony, came running to meet us. She had not changed. At once she set half my fears at rest, and that was like her too.

"How glad I am, Deborah," she declared, "that you are in disgrace since it has brought you to me."

"Do not be a gaoler to me," I begged. "I have done no wrong."

"Do I not know it?" she said.

Arms linked, we pushed open the small round-topped wooden door that led into the Blakes' garden. The plum trees were laden with fruit, unripe yet; the sunflowers stood sentinel still against the wall. All over the garden paths pumpkins and marrow plants wove a trellis of flowers and leaves, and the wood of the garden bench on which we seated ourselves seemed never to have grown cold since we sat there last.

I had been tongue-tied until this moment and then, suddenly, I found I had so much to say I scarcely knew where to begin.

From family affairs we went on to speak of Heywood Dare. Having mourned his death and the manner of it with Mary who had known him well, I went on to speak of Jasper's journey and my own. "A maroon-coloured coach," I said, "drove us out of malice, I am certain, into the ditch."

I laughed as I spoke, for the adventure, I believed, was over and behind us now.

Mary did not laugh. "A maroon-coloured coach," she said, "I do dislike all maroon-coloured coaches. Later I will tell you why. But first," — hurrying a little in her speech, she laid a hand that was somewhat cold upon my knee — "I have news for you. The rest can wait. The Duke will come to us here in Taunton with all his Force in a few days' time. Will that be well for you, Deborah, or not?"

"What will you do with me?" I said. "For I am determined to see Oliver."

"I will keep an eye upon you, as I promised," Mary said. "I will do no more than that. In return you must do nothing out of the ordinary to distress your people in Lyme or disgrace me."

"Where Oliver and I are concerned I do not know what is

ordinary and what is not," I said. "But I will not disgrace you."

"Then we are agreed." Mary looked at me. "So it is all magical with you both now while I have no thought except for the Cause." She sighed first, then laughed. "You have not asked me when the Duke is expected here."

"Tell me," I said.

"He will come upon the nineteenth of June, in five days' time," she said. "I am to be very busy while he is here. I am to present him with a Bible and a sword while my children — my children in the school — will make him a gift at the same time of as many Colours as he has Regiments, Colours which they themselves have made. They are at work upon them now." She got to her feet. "Come, let me show them to you."

We moved indoors. The brass knobs on the white balcony shone just as I had remembered them; the vine that had overgrown the balcony cast the same moving fret of shadows on the polished boards. Mary's scholars were there, twenty-two of them, from about nine years of age to twelve, seated in a wide circle in the centre of the room, the Duke's Colours of red and green and blue and yellow glowing like a bed of flowers between them upon the floor. Outside the circle an older girl seated upon a tall stool read to them from a small brown book upon her knee. Her voice was cool; the words appeared cooler still:— "I have a Key in my bosom called Promise that will, I am persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle . . ."

"I wish I might find that key," Mary said, turning away, "for in these days I am often in Doubting Castle and wish I might escape from it. The reading is from Master Bunyan, as you will know."

I followed her into the next room. Once there I was encouraged to continue my story of the maroon-coloured coach. I did so.

"My fine gentleman," I finished, "may have been a King's spy. He was so confident he could discover everything he wished to know."

"I can guess whom you encountered," Mary said. "You must believe me, Deborah, when I tell you that the King's agents are everywhere. They know all our plans. In London already more than a hundred of our friends have been arrested before they

could make a move. In Cheshire my Lord Delamere and his party whom we were depending upon are so watched and spied upon they dare not declare for us. Meanwhile my Lord Churchill and a third of the King's Forces are on the march. No commander in Europe, I am told, moves more quickly."

Alarm clouding my mind, I made haste to speak. "I do not think all the brains are on the King's side or in my Lord Churchill's head. And it is Louis Durras, Lord Feversham, who will be in command. Or so I have heard. Surely it will not be too difficult to deal with him."

"I wish we might count upon doing so," Mary said, "for his only merit as a General is that he is a Frenchman."

We moved on to the balcony. The sun was setting; a few candles shone out here and there in the opposite windows; the scent of honeysuckle and the smell of green leaves came in.

Together we looked down into the street. It was empty except for a coach driven at a spanking pace towards us and swaying from side to side as it came.

I think we knew what we should see. We waited nevertheless while the maroon-coloured coach of my morning's adventure, the same squat coachman on the box, drew near enough to be seen, swayed past, then rolled out of sight.

"It is as I thought," Mary said, "or rather, it is as I feared when you spoke first. He has come himself."

"Who has come?" I said.

"Roger L'Estrange," Mary replied. "Soon to be Sir Roger. That is his coach. In Taunton we know it well."

"I have never heard of him," I said.

Mary spoke quietly. "Have you not? You will hear of him. The London printers call him Dog Towzer. He is in truth the King's bloodhound. As Surveyor of Printing Presses it is his duty to hound out those printers who print matter that has not been licensed to be printed, anything, that is, that might be considered harmful to the King's interests. L'Estrange does not act alone, he has an army of spies and informers up and down the country to assist him. They serve more purposes than one. He will discover our secrets if he can — indeed he has discovered many of them already, as I have told you — and destroy us all."

Her hand sought mine. "Now you know why I do not like maroon-coloured coaches."

4

CITY OF GREEN BOUGHS

THE Duke entered Taunton on Thursday, June the eighteenth, four thousand or more men with him — a force to be reckoned with indeed, but not yet an army.

Every house was garlanded in his honour; green boughs hung from every window and the streets were strewn with rosemary and lavender and with flowers. No army, I am certain, was ever more joyfully received, no army ever trod on roses and lilies, clove pinks and peonies before. The fine June weather held, not a cloud showed, and the sun, Midsummer Day not far off, appeared unwilling ever to leave the sky.

I looked for Oliver in the Duke's bodyguard and found him. Overjoyed, though I could not speak to him as yet, I ran down from the Blakes' balcony into the street and encountered William Cox.

Where was my Uncle Edmund Hawkesley, I enquired, and my cousin John? Both were in Lyme, William informed me, collecting horses and arms and more men.

In my excitement I ran beside William. How was my Aunt Margaret Hawkesley? I asked. "Poorly," William said, and again, "poorly."

I felt he reproached me. "It is by my aunt's wishes, William," I said, "that I am here."

I do not think he believed me. If my aunt were indeed poorly, then I ought in duty to return, I knew, and William, who loved my aunt as all my uncle's men loved her, knew that also. But I would not return, I resolved, unless she sent for me. In Lyme only a desert of dull days waited for me. In Taunton, while the Duke's Forces were here, lay all the happiness in

each other's company Oliver and I might ever know.

No more than a part, though we did not know it yet, of two clear days was ours. In the mornings the Duke's forces drilled and practised musketry; by night, since an army must learn to move in the dark, they marched and drilled again. Only in the afternoons did they rest and do what they pleased. It was then that Oliver and I would meet.

I do not remember very clearly where we went, nor why, any more than when one walks in dreams. We held hands; we kissed over gates; ours, I am certain, was the most ordinary way of going on in the world. I remember a greenness everywhere and the bright sheen of flowers, the sun's light so clear about us the very air seemed filled with gold.

Oliver was never the importunate gusty lover. He loved, he revered, he even worshipped a little, and I, who knew the hard self-seeking thing I was, felt myself humbled by so much love, and grateful and proud also. Though we moved dangerously near the edge of passion, as lovers must, I stayed as safe with him as even my Aunt Margaret might wish, and never desired while these days lasted to be otherwise.

For his part Oliver appeared content. He laughed more often as if some part of the burden of purpose and belief he had carried for so long had lifted. He took pleasure in all the little foolish things we heard and saw; he looked outside himself, as it were, for the first time. And now he who had always appeared so remote from me came most near. I think this time was given us to stand for him in place of length of days, for me in place of that ease and safety women love, that I, too, desired.

We talked — I remember how we talked. Even so we left a world of laughter not touched upon, a passion of things unsaid. We did not speak of the Duke's plans, nor of the battle that must come, nor of victory. All this, with every other care we put out of our minds until the end. We talked chiefly of what concerned ourselves.

Oliver spoke of his mother in Exeter. He did so as if she were some friendly but distant acquaintance whose foibles he observed but did not share. She was devout, I knew, and held some brave beliefs that would have sent her, as they had sent my Lord

Russell, to the Tower or the scaffold if she had published them abroad, that God was a Spirit, that men were free and equal since they were created by the same God, that bad kings could be deposed, that kings, being men, could never be divine. Her husband had possessed little, it seemed, beyond his land and his house, neither very great, and a most still tongue. As the daughter and heiress of an Exeter clothier she had brought him money and more land, neither of which he had cared for very much. She had been brown and handsome in her day. But when religion took possession of her she had turned against herself and rubbed her beauty out. The world she lived in now, of prayers and holy thoughts, was not the world I knew of sudden impulses and warmth and a myriad intermingled things, but one, it seemed to me, she had most tidily cut down to suit herself.

She ruled her household, Oliver said, as if it had been an army. There was no liberty, he declared, for himself or his sister in their mother's house, and little love.

"From this tyranny," he went on, "my sister escaped to Virginia by way of marriage to a neighbour's son who wished to settle there, while I, as soon as I was old enough, betook myself to London and the Inns of Court."

"Where you encountered Mistress Bland's ideas again," I said.

He laughed. "And embraced them too."

"I think you never loved her," I said. "Was she not hurt by your lack of love for her? Did she not know?"

"How is it possible to love if there is never any show of love?" he asked. "My mother made no show of love to my sister or to me, she gave no sign of ever being hurt at any absence of love from us. No, nor any sign of understanding either. After my sister had left for Virginia — I was twelve at the time — I lacked all company. The world appeared strange to me like my room at night, and as empty. I peopled it as best I could. I loved the shadows the firelight and the candlelight threw upon the panelled walls. I would watch them move and take shape, dissolve and form again like clouds. And then, perhaps because I took too much pleasure in them, both firelight and candlelight were taken from me and I was left to the terrors of the dark. I could have cried out but I did not. Instead I found other things to comfort

me. I would lie awake and listen to the sounds outside, such a stir of sound — the creak of boughs, hedgehogs or badgers rustling, the patter of dead leaves, the whirr of a nightjar in summer low on some bough, and in winter, thinner than frost or cold, the cry of an owl hunting. I was neither happy nor unhappy," he said. "I was solitary, that is all."

I said, for I was angry with Mistress Bland for a moment, "It was unkind, it was un-Christian to treat you so."

Oliver laughed. "I did well enough. Though sometimes my head felt too large for me as if it were crammed too full of thoughts. And sometimes I would find myself walking on tiptoe the house was so silent."

"What was it like when you were older?" I asked. "Surely it was different then?"

"I went," Oliver said, "to Blundell's School. That helped. I met John there, as you know. I owe him all the friendship I had at that time. It was perhaps not a great deal for I remained solitary. I have never found it easy to be intimate with another person; I have never caught the habit of loving, and the trick — it seems like a trick to me sometimes — of being loved in return. Only when I went to London did I find the companionship I had lacked so far. I met Colonel Algernon Sidney and Colonel Rumbold and a host more. I spoke with my Lord Shaftesbury and became a member of the Green Ribbon Club. It was there that I came to know Christopher Battiscombe and the two Hewlings. The freedom I began to find within myself seemed to match the freedom all of us in the New Country Party sought to make in the world outside. There was only one freedom, I would tell myself. Half the evil in the world, it seemed to me then, sprang from some sort of tyranny." He paused. "Do I speak too earnestly? Upon my life I do not care very much for this sort of talk."

"Why should you not care for it?" I said. "Do you think I do not wish to know?"

"Truly," he said, "at first I was not at all fanatical. I did not bind myself to any one policy. But gradually, from the worsening of events after sixteen eighty-two I was drawn deeper in. One by one, as you know, the leaders of the New Country Party were picked off. His Grace of Monmouth, dearly loved son to King

Charles though he was, was banished; my Lord of Shaftesbury and scores more fled overseas; Stephen Colledge, Sir Thomas Armstrong, my Lord Russell and Colonel Algernon Sidney died upon the scaffold; my Lord Essex was murdered, it is thought, within the Tower. And the Green Ribbon Club was closed.

"Like many hundreds more who had stayed on in London I turned serious. I saw that opinion was not enough, that the time for action must come. I put love behind me. I would come back to it, I thought. But now, suddenly, you are here and I am more free than ever I was and more content."

I drew nearer him. "And you regret nothing?"

He hesitated. "I would make amends to John if it were possible."

I cried out in protest at that. "What could you do that would not hurt us both?"

"Nothing," he said after a moment. "Nothing probably."

Oliver's manner much more than anything he had said troubled me. My thoughts grew hurrying and confused; the day itself, though it was bright as ever as we moved on, seemed overcast. I had put regret for John's hurt behind me. Could not Oliver, I thought, have done the same? But he would not. Plainly his conscience was involved. I feared this conscience of his; I feared what it might do. It matched John's obstinacy and John's jealous pride. Like them it was not to be reasoned with nor overcome. It could come between Oliver and me, I thought, more detestably than a cold bolster or a third bedfellow.

At first I could find no words for what I thought, but then, as mildly as any woman could, I said, "In this matter of John could you not put regret behind you as I have done?"

"Give me time and I will," Oliver said, "I promise you."

How much time? I thought. Time, always short for lovers, appeared doubly short for us. Already the bugles were sounding the Return; already other lovers were beginning to hurry anxiously over the fields.

By the gate where Oliver and I had met earlier that afternoon we parted.

"Now that I have found you do not go from me," he said.

"I will not, oh, I will not," I promised him.

The bugles sounded again. My face hidden, I clung to him. Now, from the passion of love that moved me, I could not speak.

5

A DAY WITHOUT A STAIN

OUR last day in Taunton arrived, a day without a stain. The west wind blew over the hayfields, the air seemed full of the songs of birds and the movement of boughs and leaves. The clouds raced overhead, their shadows sped over the hills; I could believe the round earth moved, that the great sun himself leaped in the sky.

We walked through fields of ripening grass sewn thick with flowers; the wild rose branches lifted; the small birds, caught in the strong currents of air, flew sharply up and then, as sharply, down; a speckled butterfly lit on my finger for half an hour or more as if it had no longer any strength to fly, and all the while its feet stayed cool as flowers.

We found a small warm hollow beside the Tone and rested there. Oliver had been thoughtful while we walked; he continued silent now. I knew that the latest information our men had received was not good, that the Duke was in conference at this moment with my Lord Grey and Colonel Wade; I could not hide from myself the fact that decisions of the first importance to us all were being taken at this moment of which, as yet, we should learn nothing.

While I waited, Oliver's head upon my knees, I let my thoughts run out in an idle sort of fashion: I wished the speckled butterfly were on my finger still — it had seemed so frail a thing. By some sort of association I remembered my Aunt Margaret; I hoped that she were well once more and no longer vexed with me; I prayed most earnestly that my Uncle Edmund might keep safe, that the Duke might decide wisely in spite of two such poor counsellors as my Lord Grey and General Wade, and that

somehow, and very quickly too, the troubles that beset us all might be overcome — I prayed, in short, for everything to happen that would suit myself.

Oliver turned his head into my lap so that for a second I could not see his face, then looked at me. "Shall we ever be as happy together as we are now and as content? For I am content, in spite of everything."

"And you are never afraid," I said.

"Of losing love," he said, "and ending and growing old? Yes. I think of these things sometimes, but they no longer trouble me greatly. I am chiefly concerned for you and for us both. And for the Cause. There nothing we have done so far promises well. We fumble and feel our way as if we were blindfold. We do no more, I think, than drift along, waiting for help that may never come. And all the while time passes. This is a small island, Deborah, and yet it seems to me sometimes to be vaster than the Americas there are so many parts of it that return no answers when we send to them — Scotland, Wales, the Northern counties, London itself. No answers," he said. "Would it not be more courteous to refuse the help we need? The Duke's proclaiming himself King as he intends to do will not help either. It will do us great harm with the Prince of Orange first, whose neutrality we need, and after that with hundreds of our own folk also. The Duke gave his word he would not lay claim to the Crown unless Parliament desired him to do so. When he breaks his word and flouts Parliament he is no better than King James himself. I did not think when I stood up for Liberty a few days back that I should see him served most fulsomely on bended knee while my Lord Churchill and the King's men draw nearer every hour. We should be winning battles, not proclaiming kings." Oliver bent his head once more upon my knees. "I am so sick at heart sometimes I am in danger of forgetting my own promises."

I bent over him. "This is a kind of darkness you are feeling now and it will pass."

"Where did you learn," he asked, "to give so much comfort?"

"Could it not be in me?" I asked. "Like left-handedness?"

"Only you would call comfort left-handedness," he said and laughed. He half-joked again. "Have you ever thought how hard

it is to be a man? To be so many things at the same time, and valiant always? If you knew the secret doubts we suffer, how near we come at times to weakness and something like despair." He broke off. "To-morrow or the day after, perhaps to-day — dare you think of it? — almost I dare not — the army will have left Taunton."

I tried to comfort him and myself. "The battle cannot be fought yet."

"This is the battle," he said, "that I must leave you, that I may not take the touch of you and the feel and the knowledge of you with me."

Why may you not? I thought. Why? I bent and kissed his mouth, I leaned nearer and held his head against my breast.

And then he drew me down to him and we lay close together for a while, the world most peacefully shut out.

The wind fell away: it seemed to me that it moved softly to another place. I was aware of the red-and-white cattle snatching at the grass on the other side and the deep under-current of sound the river made; I could hear the little monotonous songs of the small birds in the alder trees. For a moment I think I saw as clearly as if it had been drawn for me the pattern of our love and the way — no easy primrose path — that it would take.

Our moment did not last. The cattle, curious creatures always, splashed near and sniffed at us, all lowering heads and horns and a smell of river water and wet green grass. We shot apart. Tails out, they frisked away. Sitting up, we caught each other's hands and laughed.

* * *

On the following morning, the morning of Sunday, the twenty-first of June, the Duke's army marched away. The fifes shrilled, the drums beat, the horses tossed their plumes, the steel breastplates, burnished with wood ash and neats' oil, shone. Once more the balconies were crowded, the pavements packed for the second time with sightseers come from far and near to wish us well. The army kept the same order it had followed when

it marched in, but now seven hundred or a thousand more men were added to them.

The spectacle was stirring enough yet to-day nothing was the same: there were no flowers, no garlands; in place of so much joy a new awareness was plainly to be seen on every face. The weather, too, had changed. The sun shone only sullenly; the air itself, moist and threatening rain, seemed grey.

I stood beside Mary Blake on her balcony looking down on the marching ranks of men and the crowded street. The green banner of the New Country Party borne bravely before him, the Duke passed, sword in one hand, Bible (both of which Mary and her children had presented to him only that morning) in the other, the smile with which he had greeted us fading too quickly from his face.

There was a price, everyone was aware, upon his head. Not only that. Accused and condemned of high treason by Act of Parliament he was the late James Scott, Duke of Monmouth; in the eyes of the law he was already dead. He had taken his condemnation lightly at first, but now, it was said, the certainty of his own fate if he were captured weighed on him.

The Duke's bodyguard, Oliver among them, followed. From the moment my eyes lit on him, though there were many more among the young men about the Duke who greeted me, I saw only his face. I can see it still.

So the army passed under bluebell-coloured skies. The last baggage train rumbled out of sight, the sounds of fife and drum faded at last in the heavy air. A sudden wind stirred the withered garlands and scuffled the dead flowers dustily about the streets. People bent their heads to it and moved away.

Mary shivered beside me. "Pray Heaven it does not rain."

I prayed so too. Our men were ill-clad and ill-provisioned and the way they must take to Bridgwater and beyond, to Bath and Bristol lay over rough country and marshy moors, through deep ravines and rocky river beds, over unkept miry paths.

All that day Mary and I laboured with the maids in the kitchens and about the house. Since every task had been neglected so that the army might be fed and served there was much to do. In the streets below water was being sluiced over pavements and

cobblestones, windows flung wide, workaday breeches and jackets which Taunton men had left behind when they marched away in their best, put out to dry.

Dogs barked, small children ran noisily up and down, the sun shone out fitfully once more and gradually a forced bustle, a purposeful brightness covered, though it did not hide, the anxiety that could clearly be felt everywhere. As the day wore on imagination played strange tricks on me. I looked out at dusk and could have sworn I saw Jasper riding post-haste towards me. Though I went out to meet him no-one was there.

Only when Mary and I lay side by side in the same bed that night did we find time to speak of the day's affairs and of what was in our minds.

But first Mary scolded me as I had half-expected she would and forgave me in the same breath, as I had expected too. "You have seen more of Oliver Bland than I wished. I fear I have not kept one half of the promises I made your aunt."

She reproached me also. "You have not once asked me for news of Roger L'Estrange."

I said what was perfectly true. "I had forgotten him."

"Then I must tell you he stayed at *The White Harte* that night and questioned everyone there. In the morning, having paid only half his reckoning, he drove away, uttering threats against them all. He went on to Bridgwater," Mary said and paused.

I stared at her. "So the Duke has followed him? Why?"

Mary leaned her head nearer mine and began whispering. "The King's men are so close upon the Duke's heels he has no choice. Colonel Piercy Kirke is at Dorchester with the King's regiments just returned from Tangiers; my Lord Churchill is no further away with his eight troops of Dragoons than Chard."

She slipped a cold hand in mine. "I cannot tell you half the things I have heard. That the West is only a corner of England; if the North does not rise, if London does not come to our aid, could it not prove, they say, a cage?"

"Who are they who say this?" I asked.

"My Lord Grey," she said, "and Colonel Wade and others also." She began whispering again. "I pray for them, Deborah,

that deliverance may come soon, that the battle may be ours."

Hands clasped, we lay still. Our heart-beats seemed to fill the quiet room, through the drawn curtains the scent of night stocks and damp leaves came in. I remember even now the light tapping sound the vine leaves made against the window panes and the cool polished texture of the linen sheets.

We slept at last, only to be wakened towards morning by a loud persistent knocking on the Blakes' outer door.

I stirred uneasily and Mary said, a new firmness in her voice, "That could be for you only, Deborah, or it could be the King's men come for us both."

"It is for me only," I said. "I am certain of it."

My cloak about me, I hurried down.

6

RETURN TO LYME

AS I had expected, no-one more formidable than Jasper waited for me. And yet that was alarming enough.

He was self-important and disapproving as well.

I was to come at once, he declared. Mistress herself had sent for me.

Only when my goodbyes were said and we were on our way was I able to question him. Why had I been sent for? Was my aunt poorly still?

"Poorly, ah," said Jasper. "But lor! 'Tis nothing. My Clarice has miscarried half a dozen times and been not a penny the worse."

"A miscarriage!" I bounced in my saddle from annoyance. "Why was I not told? Why could you not say so before?"

" 'Tis not herself Mistress has in mind," Jasper said. " 'Tis Master. He should be on his way to Bridgwater by this time along with the rest of them. But he'll not leave her till you come. Ah, 'tis a fair caution to know where a man ought to be these

days. I would as lief be out of Lyme meself, for Sodom and Gomorrah is come to the place now that the King's men have moved in."

"A fig for Sodom and Gomorrah, Jasper," I cried. "Why cannot you be plain?"

" 'Tis plain enough if you would but listen," Jasper declared. "Mistress fears Master will be taken if he stays. And so he will, soon as whistle, if the King's men do but come looking for him. Ah, he was always venturesome I've hee-ard. There's not a tall tree for miles around he haven't climbed and fell out of. The long and the short of it is he'll not leave Mistress alone and there is only you to be had so you'm to come."

I asked no more questions while Jasper droned on. The King's men, he said, had taken possession of the Duke's three ships in the Bay and all that was in them. He shook his head. "Ah, 'tis marvellous how often the Devil do go about to spoil the Lord's handiwork. But Master is hid," he finished. "You do know, Mistress Deborah, where he can hide."

"I know," I said. I knew also that no hiding place would serve him for long.

We travelled on, not stopping through the night, over rough roads and rougher bridle tracks, under straggling clouds and a few great stars that presently hid themselves like candles God himself had suddenly put out. That night and in the early morning I did not love this earth — it appeared too uncertain and too dark a place. I wished that the stars were not hidden or that the moon would shine; most of all I wished that I might find my uncle safe, or safely gone.

About seven of the clock, in a fine drizzle of rain we came into Lyme. The King's men were indeed everywhere to be seen about the town: outside the Chapel on the hill, at every street corner and in every inn yard. There was a smell of bacon cooking and beer warming to make us hungry, while the smoke from half a dozen charcoal braziers showed like funeral plumes in the misty air. We could see more King's men drawn up outside my uncle's house. I remember my hands trembled, my heart gave one last leap of courage at sight of them, then turned to lead as we drew near.

A Captain of Dragoons came out from our door and accosted us rudely. Who were we? What was our errand?

Only when Gramercy came running out and vouched for us were we allowed in. I had no feeling left, I think, when our outer door closed heavily and silently behind us as it always did and we were inside. For this reason, perhaps, it did not appear strange to me that the young Lieutenant of Dragoons whom I had encountered on the Cob on the day of the Duke's landing should be waiting to receive me outside our long parlour door.

Would I be pleased, he said, inclining his head most courteously, to step within?

I did so, only to find Captain Julian seated within the room in my uncle's chair. He gazed at me very steadily as I came in, a broad-brimmed beaver hat very like my uncle's hat twirling slowly between his hands. I took my cue from him and did not speak. His chair, I noticed, was drawn well forward over the Turkey carpet, over the trap-door of stone that led to the cellars below and finally to the shore.

From all this I guessed that my uncle was within the house still and that Captain Julian was intent on winning time for him. Well, I could win time for him also. I sat down and spread my skirts about me as every modest woman should and folded my hands.

I had not long to wait. The same Captain of Dragoons who had accosted us when Jasper and I approached the house came in.

Straddling in front of my chair, he questioned me. Where was my aunt? Where was Mistress Margaret Hawkesley?

"Where should she be, sir," I said, "but in her room?"

"What ails her?" He leaned nearer so that I could smell the bear's grease pomade upon his hair. "Is she not," he asked, "sick of the small pox?"

"Of a miscarriage, sir, I believe," I said, "though I have not seen her yet."

"It is as well for you," he said, "you did not lie."

He stood for a moment, scowling and displeased, then came at me a second time. Knocking a knee repeatedly against mine, he asked again, "Where is the traitor, Edmund Hawkesley, your uncle?"

"How should I know, sir?" I said, stiffening. "Did you not see me arrive from Taunton not half an hour ago?"

He straightened once more. "If I find him he shall hang," he said. "And you shall be whipped, mistress, and soundly too, I promise you, for your concealment of him."

I closed my eyes, for the manners of the man even more than his threats sickened me. In a little while he went out. And now the relief I felt at being rid of him was torn by a new fear. If everyone else kept silent as to my uncle's whereabouts would not my small cousin Dinah betray us all? She was fearless always, and she was not used to being silenced.

At the thought cold beads of sweat as when I stood too long in chapel gathered about my temples and my lips. The faces in the room darkened before my eyes; the room itself grew dark. I leaned forward, my head upon my knees, and found time to think that all this weakness on my part was due to the fact that I was weary and saddle-sore and quite unfed. Above me but as though far away I could hear doors opening and shutting, furniture being moved and the clump of heavy feet.

My faintness began to pass. I recovered to find the Lieutenant standing stiffly beside me and Captain Julian looking fixedly ahead. Funniest of all, Gramercy (by whose orders I do not know), was advancing steadily towards me, a silver cup of water spilling over in one hand. I drank from it and she retreated again.

Now a different sound from any I had heard so far caught my ear. Thrusting the damp hair from my forehead, I listened again. A boat, I thought, was being moved cautiously in the cellars beneath over the stones.

I spoke to the Lieutenant in order to disguise the sound, "Sir, may I not go?"

He did not answer. For a moment I thought he listened too.

Head bent, Captain Julian held my uncle's broad-brimmed hat before his eyes. Whether he prayed or merely hid his face I did not know.

I stirred. As I did so I could have sworn I heard a boat move away.

Avoiding all hands stretched out towards her, my cousin Dimity came running in. I caught her to me. After so long a

time it was sweet to feel the warmth of her and the fine thin line of her ribs through her nightgown.

She frowned and slipped from me as I might have known she would. "Too close," she said.

Captain Julian held her then. Once more I feared what she might say.

She leaned against Captain Julian confidently. "I thought to have another brother," she said, and sighed. "But I could not. Pity," she said.

The Captain and a number of his men returned noisily. There was no gloomier face than his, I am certain, in Lyme. The house had been searched from attic to cellar, it seemed, and nothing had been found. They would search the warehouses now.

A dozen men left. A handful, together with the Captain and the Lieutenant, remained.

Once more my cousin Dinah's voice startled me. "Why . . . " I heard, "why . . . "

Captain Julian's hands covered her mouth. She wriggled free. "Why do they not *all* go?" she asked in ringing tones.

The Captain instructed us now, brutally after his fashion, but briefly also, on our new state. We were prisoners, it seemed, or rather we were under partial arrest. We were no longer free, that is, to come and go as we pleased. We must pay no visits, receive no callers. Above all, on pain of death, we must give no help to the King's enemies, whoever they were, wherever they might be found. In all these matters we were answerable to Lieutenant Edward Hobey, who would take possession of the house and command us all.

We would be answerable to Lieutenant Hobey, I said.

Then we could go. The Captain dismissed us curtly.

I rose and curtsied to the Captain first, to the Lieutenant afterwards, and then to Captain Julian.

Not to be outdone Dinah, who had risen with me, curtsied too. Hand in hand, she and I moved down the lane the Lieutenant and his men made for us towards the door, Dinah turning her toes in as she walked and looking down at them, two things she liked to do when she was mightily pleased with herself.

ALL THE KING'S MEN

THERE were not more than two hundred and fifty King's men, all told, in the town. And yet, as if they had been a visitation of May beetles, the bustle and the stir they made, even the smell of them, seemed everywhere.

Night and day the streets echoed to alarms; musket shots rang out, shouts and screams could occasionally be heard and the sound of running feet. After dark the taverns spilled over with drunken men. Numbers of them, so drunk as to be past caring what became of them, lay in the gutters. The sparrows perched on their heads and sometimes pecked at them; the grey dish-water hurled from the windows of the houses ran merrily over their feet. Before morning their friends bundled them into wheelbarrows and trundled them away.

My aunt and I were more fortunate than many of our neighbours. Our house was ordered by Lieutenant Hobey as neatly as the Courts of Heaven and as firmly also. My aunt, my cousin Dinah and Gramercy and I sat up aloft; the Lieutenant's men stayed below, while he himself governed everything impartially and as though invisibly from somewhere between.

We did our best to keep aloof. My aunt stayed within her room while I dealt with the Lieutenant in the many matters which concerned us all within the house. He would leave formal notes on our long parlour table. "Lieutenant Hobey requests that Mistress Deborah Hawkesley will speak with him." The time would be suggested and the place. Writing tablet in hand, keys jingling at her waist, Mistress Deborah Hawkesley would attend.

He and I stayed formal enough. But under so frozen a surface a thaw, I felt, was near. The notes grew less formal in manner, or we dispensed with them. In place of written notes the Lieutenant's man would be sent in search of me. The Lieutenant was older than I was, I gathered, and had seen something of foreign service and the world, yet there was a youthfulness about him that belied his years. Sometimes, for I was by nature over-given to laughing, I wished to laugh at him — his legs were so long, he

appeared so neat and trim, and bulrushlike and yellow-topped as well, like bulrushes in June. There was a simplicity about him which I could recognise since it matched the simplicity in me, yet I never made the mistake of thinking him a fool. His eyes, I felt, missed nothing. Besides that he had a most rare gift, until it suited him to speak, of silence. These points in his favour, I may say, were only gradually borne in on me.

My aunt, who could never resist a comely young man, yielded more quickly. She had observed him, she said, looking down most kindly upon Dinah while the latter was putting her doll Sheba to bed upon the garden path. He was most considerate of us, she declared, and we ought to show him some small consideration in return. It was not correct, she went on, hurrying a little while I stayed silent, that he should have only one hard pillow to his head. And so, to content her, I gave him two.

My cousin Dinah was harder to move. But even she, I noticed, began to favour the young man not indeed with smiles as yet but with long considering stares.

Only Gramercy was at pains to keep her enmity intact. She had always a high sense of drama in all that she did: now she took openly to play-acting. She held her head ridiculously high when waiting upon the Lieutenant and his men; she laced her waist, as if to give an added firmness to her mind, uncomfortably tight so that I who had not her height or strength must heave the pot of porridge (enough for three Hawkesleys and twelve King's men), from the fire unaided, or lift the two great crocks of dough to the table from the warm hearth.

She turned secret and superstitious also. If there was a buzz of bluebottle flies in the room she refused to talk. They could hear what was said, she declared, and might well report to the King's men all that they had heard. Since it was summer and the bluebottles were seldom absent we seldom spoke. The time she saved in speech with me she spent in conversations of a higher kind. There were other worlds, she affirmed, than Heaven or Hell. There were magic spirit worlds where demons ruled. She communed and spoke with them, she said. God, she was certain, did not dwell above the moon.

I left her to the spirits thankfully. I thought her mad and did not envy them. And in these days I had much to trouble me in the world below in the shape of anxieties I could scarcely bear.

On the day that the Duke's army left Taunton for Bridgwater the weather broke in earnest. Most unmercifully, from this day on it rained. Even Noah and his Ark could not have experienced a more drowning time. For days the downpour did not cease; the sun seldom shone. Throughout the western counties land and sea were as though blotted out; there was only the rush and fall of water to be heard and seen and the hiss and smoke of the rain. Nothing could have been more damaging to our hopes; no single factor could have brought greater discouragement to our men and to us all.

It was not difficult to imagine the hardships our men endured. Burdened with guns and baggage waggons and the rest, ill-equipped and poorly fed, without tents, without a base to which they might return, they struggled on, the King's men always at their heels. It was small wonder as the days passed that the faith with which they had set out burned somewhat dim.

At Bridgwater the Duke's plans had suffered one more change. He had hoped to rest and train his army there but once more, as at Taunton, the enemy were too close for rest or safety. My Lord Churchill was at Langport, only twelve miles away; my Lord Feversham was no further off than Chippenham. And so the Duke compromised once more. Bristol and London still in mind, he took the road to Glastonbury and Wells; he journeyed west.

And still it rained. I know that even while I slept I dreamed of the plight our men were in. As if I had been there I saw the velvet coats patched and mottled with the rain, the rusting breastplates and the draggled plumes and, most pitiful of all, the foot soldiers' limping, swollen feet.

The despatches that reached us in these early days were carried by the Duke's runners over the cliff paths into Lyme. Coming in secretly by night or in the early morning hours, they brought letters with them also. On Captain Julian's instructions I played my part as other women in the town did also, in distributing them.

There had been little danger so far in what I did, yet it was sleepy work. I learned to keep awake between the hours of two and four when the messengers most frequently arrived even though my senses longed for sleep. My bedroom window open, I would listen until I could hear the latch of the wicket gate at the end of our cliff-top garden lift, then fall once more into place as it often did at night when the wind stirred. In slippers and cloak I would go out to close it again. Sometimes but by no means always, the Duke's messenger whose face I could never see would be there. A packet of letters would be thrust into my hands, another would be handed over by me; the latch would drop once more, very softly, into place. No word having been spoken between us, I would go in.

My uncle's letter from Bridgwater came to us in this manner; a letter from John to his mother and one for me from Oliver Bland followed.

My uncle wrote only that his thoughts were with us, that he would write again from Shepton Mallet where the Duke would wait for news from London or the North, that important decisions would be taken there and acted upon, he hoped, *come what might*.

His letter troubled me greatly. Where his family was concerned he was not wont to be so brief. By comparison John appeared curiously light-hearted. He had no longer any time for melancholy, he declared, and no wish for the first time in his life to complain. The confusion in the Duke's army was not so great as he had feared, yet it was great enough to make a man weep or laugh. No one decided anything, and yet certain things were done, he supposed by themselves; he had a highwayman for a friend — what, thought I, another! — who would rob him of his purse to-morrow but whom he liked well enough; his new horse was one of the best in the company — the rest were a sorry lot fresh from the moors or the plough. Indeed, by comparison with them, his own horse was so good he feared once the bugles sounded he might be obliged to lead the charge. He himself was so bitten by hordes of midges he could not, from scratching so much, think of us as he should. He asked for a pot of my aunt's *Balm against Bites* and sent his dearest respects to her and to his sister

Dimity. Gramercy, he said, was to work all the magic she could, whether black or white, with *all* the powers. He remained my aunt's dutiful and loving son, John Hawkesley. To me he sent not one word.

Oliver's note was brief and somewhat dull. "Nothing succeeds with us," he wrote, "as yet. This is normal, old campaigners tell me, since nothing on either side ever goes perfectly in war. Yet the men are confident. They will be in London soon, they think. I marvel at them. They sing even in the rain."

He wrote again from Glastonbury, where they were encamped within the ruins of the Abbey walls. "The rain pours down on us like the Wrath of God. Our camp fires are constantly put out and lit again. We steam in front and shiver behind. I find it hard not to think of comforting and comfortable things, of dry beds and warming pans, of casement windows curtained against the night, of apple pudding with thick Devon cream and a roasted fowl — and above all, you."

I sent him an apple pudding of truly monstrous size by the next messenger and heard no more — the roasted fowl he could provide for himself, I thought, on the road to Bath.

After the Duke's forces left Glastonbury all letters and despatches ceased. The latch on our garden gate lifted but only the wind was there. Sometimes from the anxiety I felt I could not sleep. Then I would go out hopefully on to the cliff path only to return again with empty hands. I came to know the look of the down at most hours of the night and the drift of the clouds and the flight, when the moon rose, of the cloud shadows and the June stations of the stars. Sometimes I took great comfort to myself from all that I could feel of the oneness of sky and cloud and sea and the everlastingness of earth. At other times I turned so numb from misery I could not think at all.

One night I returned from our garden's end, where I had gone on the same vain errand, only to encounter the Lieutenant halfway down our flight of stairs. He was fully clothed; he held a lighted candle in one of our tall brass candle-sticks high in his left hand; the other, alarmingly, was on his sword.

He spoke harshly, most unlike himself. "Mistress, must I set a guard on the wicket gate?"

"Do not." I halted.

He stepped down one stair. "If you continue to give and receive messages you leave me no choice."

"What if I tell you there are no longer any letters or messages I can give or receive?" I asked.

"Do not tell me," he said. "I should hate to find myself deceived." Candle held high, his long shadow leaping a little to one side of him, he turned and went on ahead of me up the stair.

Our encounter did not alarm me greatly. I had always, I suppose without realising it, a certain amount of confidence in him. And I had spoken only the truth. But still, all things considered, it was something of an escape. A narrower was to come, for Gramercy, always the most uncomfortable of females, must hit upon this moment to bring us all on the next day to the edge of ruin.

I was sitting in the window of our long parlour room, my Bible open before me at the Book of Esther, my hands idle upon the page. I wondered what beds were like in Babylon and if Babylonish people ever laughed; I wished I had a copy of *Cyrus* before me, or some other French romance of our own time, or that Oliver himself were here so that I would have no need of any love tale. I sighed and turned to the Book of Esther again as Corporal Fletcher, the Lieutenant's man, his large feet in their top boots slithering over our polished floor, came through the open door towards me.

Would I be pleased to wait upon the Lieutenant? he asked, steering himself with some difficulty to a standstill.

My keys jingling in one hand, I followed him. Had our stock of candles run out, I wondered, or must I bake more bread? Worse still, had Sophy, our tortoiseshell, who wore a green ribbon round her neck like a loyal Monmouth cat, chosen the Lieutenant's bed for her lying-in?

I quickened my step at the thought and could not forbear laughing at Corporal Fletcher as I did so. His mouth opened in his long sheep's face, his eyes grew round as if to match his mouth; he stared.

I wondered why. For Corporal Fletcher had always been among my friends. Quite soon I knew.

The Lieutenant was waiting for me impatiently in my uncle's small closet-room. He bade me be seated. Without ceremony he began: "I know not, mistress, how to hang you all if you succeed in poisoning me, or how not to hang you if by any chance you should be discovered and have failed."

Like a flock of pigeons my wits scattered and flew wide, then wheeled to centre again.

"No-one in this house would poison you, sir," I said.

"Would they not?" He looked hard at me. "Seven of my men are ill, mistress, Fletcher's brother dangerously so, while I myself have been mightily sick and vomiting."

I saw how pale he was, I took note of the beads of sweat about his lips. "Is there no other illness you and your men might suffer from in this house, sir, but poisoning?" I asked. Even as I spoke I could not help but pity him.

"None, by my faith. Does this not prove it?" He tossed what appeared to be a wax doll upon the table. It slid on the polished surface for a moment, then lay grotesquely sprawled. It was a small waxen image of a King's Dragoon in scarlet jacket and white breeches, its belly stuck through most cruelly with pins. "Sewn," he said, "into the curtains of my bed."

I started up and then, as hastily, sat down. "No Hawkesley would do this," I said.

"Who then?" He waited. While he did so he held himself, I felt, very still.

Only Gramercy, I thought. From horror I stayed dumb.

He struck the edge of the table with the flat of his hand. "By the living God, Mistress, if you keep silent, you will hang us all." Once more he leaned forward. "Has your maid done this? It can only be your maid."

"I cannot accuse her," I said. I spoke wildly. I had no love for Gramercy and she had none for me, yet she was part of our household. I said as much.

He ran a most unsoldier-like hand through his hair. "Lord," he complained, "Lord, I am in all ways most sorely tired. But I will be patient."

Once again he leaned towards me. "You must understand, Mistress Hawkesley, that if this thing is known and enquiries are made, all that I have hidden so far for your sake must come out into the light of day. I could neither save you nor protect myself. If your maid is guilty she must go from Lyme quicker than any broomstick can carry her."

All that he had hidden for my sake, I thought — my uncle's boat getting away, the letters I had received and despatched again by way of the wicket gate? What else? I looked at him.

He spoke gently now. "Something must be done to content my men and silence them. They know nothing positive so far, yet they suspect a great deal. I trust you, Mistress Hawkesley, for the truth." He waited once more and then, even more gently he said, "Tell me, is your maid guilty or not?"

I brushed a hand across my eyes. "She has great skill in herbs. She dabbles in magic . . ."

"And in witchcraft also." He looked about him. "What o'clock is it?" Halfway to the door and Master Tompion's clock he paused. "Rather than have her hanged so inconveniently for us all I'll wring her neck myself."

Why, that would be best, I thought, looking after him.

I remained where I was. Nothing happened. The afternoon wore on; except for the loud banging of our outer door the house stayed silent; there was the usual buzz of bluebottles though there was nothing any longer I thought, for them to hear, and a warm drone about the stocks of our honey bees. From suspense, and a realisation of the danger we were in I trembled. I had steered my way safely, I had thought, through all the shoals. And now, in spite of the Lieutenant's previous mercies towards us, shipwreck was here, as sudden and complete as if we had been cast, old Jonah-fashion, into the jaws and belly of the whale.

I had shed no tears since our men marched away. But now, from a sense of my own failure I wept. And then, from weeping and drying my eyes, and hiccupping and beginning to weep again, I wished there was someone to comfort me. No-one came. The Lieutenant, if I had him in mind as I almost believe I had, did not return.

Late that same evening he found me in our large kitchen

stirring a great pot of beef and onion stew with dumplings over the fire. The stew bubbled and spat, the dumplings bobbed like dancers up and down; a hunter's moon looked in through the leaded window panes; the candles burned steadily with an orange flame and Sophy, our cat, played a staid bedtime game of mouse with her three kittens (delivered I knew not where, or when), before the hearth.

The Lieutenant leaned over the pot. "Do I see mushrooms?"

"In June?" I asked. "how is it possible?"

"Magic," said he.

With a silk handkerchief he mopped his brow. It showed damp still. "Fletcher's brother," he said, "may die now or later, as he pleases. But he will not die. And Madam Gramercy has two hours left in which to get away."

It was long enough, I thought. I wondered where she would go or what she would do. Like Fletcher's brother she might please herself. The remembrance of the wax image remained to trouble me. Like an attack of sickness my tears returned. I hunched my shoulders to conceal the fact that I wept, I wrinkled my face in the hope of halting them: they flowed still.

The Lieutenant took our long brass spoon from me and stirred the stew. "Is it not salt enough?" said he, peering in.

"Yes," said I, sniffing.

He took the wax image from his pocket and dangled it before my eyes. Robbed of its hedgehog spikes of pins, it appeared harmless enough.

"I have shown it," he said, "to none but you."

I spoke stupidly. "Then no-one knows."

"Only the two of us," he said.

While relief flowed over me, he spoke again. "If you burn it, Mistress Deborah, I may indeed wither away."

"I'll not burn it." I clasped it to me. (I kept it and have it still.)

"Will you not?" He also appeared relieved. "I am glad that you will not."

I faced him squarely. "You have shielded us twice before this. Why?"

He turned away from me and then turned back. "Is it not plain?" By the door he paused. I thought he teased me a second time. "Since hate is akin to love, Mistress Deborah, could not the enmity between us pass for hate?"

Silk handkerchief foppishly in one hand, he went away. I heard him whistling, "Her feet beneath her petticoat . . ." down the passageway as he went.

All that he said was gallantry, I thought, and meaningless. And yet his words came back to me a score of times before it was once more day.

About this time Jasper left us. He went as suddenly as Gramercy had done, with no more than a message in Gramercy's handwriting (for Jasper could not write), thrust under my chamber door. He would return, the message ran, if I needed him. Since he left no address it was not likely, I thought, that I should ever send for him.

On my aunt's suggestion I took Clarice, Jasper's wife, into the house. She was left without support while I, with Gramercy gone, had much to do. Not that Clarice was very serviceable. A large indifferent woman, she loved best to sit looking out to sea, her children twined about her as abundantly as if she had been a grape vine.

Even the Lieutenant laughed at her. "Would she not," said he, "make a fine capital with which to begin a printed page?"

Now that I was so much in the kitchen I could not help but see more of him. Gradually we fell into the habit of talking together. Our talk was of the most occasional sort at first, easily begun, soon dropped, soon picked up again. We progressed, of course, by stages. I marvel now to think how skilfully I was led on towards a kind of friendship with him when I had sworn to keep aloof.

It was inevitable that we should begin by speaking of ourselves. I learned that he was an only child, as I was also, his two elder brothers having died, one of the sweating sickness, the other of some sort of low fever before he was born. When he was no more than six his parents followed them. From that time he was bred up by a grandfather on his mother's side who contrived without much difficulty, as so many country gentlemen did at

that time, to be both Puritan in his practise of the Protestant religion and cavalier in loyalty to the King. I heard something of the great house near Bewdley in Worcestershire which his grandfather and he had shared, the windows of which looked out towards the Severn and the Malvern Hills.

As the month wore on our acquaintance, through no fault of ours, did not progress so well. The worsening of the Duke's fortunes created a silence between us that we could not easily break. If we talked at all we could talk only of small matters. And I no longer had any taste for these. In common with many hundreds of women up and down the Western counties in these last days of June I could only grieve for the plight our men were in and fear what might follow.

It was understandable that the Duke should hesitate to risk his forces in battle until he had had time to fit them for the fight. As a professional soldier he knew the hazards of war and the most that could be demanded of any army, however valiant, as unprepared and ill-equipped as his. Yet in hesitating he wore out his own courage and the spirits of his men and the belief many of his supporters had in him.

My Uncle Edmund Hawkesley wrote on a new note of bitterness from Shepton Mallet: "It is now twelve days since the Duke landed and we have achieved nothing. We delay action too long and march too much. Our plans for a move on London have been abandoned a second time. So now we are for Bristol again in the hope of taking that great port for ourselves and wintering there. The King's forces are moving that way also. Pray God we arrive before them. The people of Bristol, we are told, will welcome us in. So no more now, with my heart's love. John's thoughts and mine are with you."

I had taken my uncle's letter and my own anxious thoughts into our garden on the cliff top. The day was early yet; the dew bent the grass blades; a young rabbit, almost invisible in the sun's rays, played engagingly upon the grass. I watched it idly and forgot myself. Presently, from the stillness about me, my thoughts themselves grew still.

As I moved to go in the Lieutenant came towards me purposefully with his long stride.

"Do not hold me in too great detestation, Mistress Hawkesley, for what may come. Truly, all that distresses you is in the times, it is not in me."

From surprise I could do no more than stare.

"I was bred up," he said, "in duty to the King. I cannot change while you, I think, do make it a duty to rebel."

From indignation now I found my tongue. "When a king goes against the law and the wishes of his people in everything, and does his best to force an unwelcome religion upon them, contrary to the law and his own Coronation oath, why then, I think it is a duty to rebel."

"The people as a whole," he said, "have not yet reached that point of no consent. They are suspicious and disturbed. As yet that is all. His Grace of Monmouth, if the truth be told, has jumped too soon."

"We followed our consciences," I said. The poverty of my own words came home to me even as I spoke.

He stooped to me. "Do you think, Mistress Hawkesley, that we on our side have no consciences?"

I said, "I think they are asleep."

"Never fear," said he, going off at a great rate and speaking over his shoulder as he did so, "never fear, if need be, they will wake."

8

THE DESERTER

THE June days dragged on and still it rained. I was to feel the cruelty of cold and snow, but now I grew to hate this misery of rain. It continued so — grey thunder rain falling with as much purpose as if it were directed from on high. While it continued I felt as if I were besieged; when it ceased to fall, as it did for short periods now and then, I waited tensely for it to begin again.

One night when the rain had for the moment ceased and the clouds were scurrying over a low grey sky I believed I heard a movement of some sort beneath my window. Scarcely knowing what to expect, I looked out.

Just visible in the grey light a man stood there. At sight of me he retreated, only to halt by my uncle's summerhouse at the garden's end.

I took swift note of him, as presently, in cloak and petticoat over my nightgown, I drew near. He was no messenger, I felt certain, but a deserter — there were many such in these days — from the Duke's army. An empty knapsack such as soldiers carry was slung from one shoulder, his cloak reached almost to the ground. Like a scarecrow left too long in the fields he smelled of rotting woollen cloth and earth and rain.

Under his shapeless hat I felt his eyes on mine. He spoke as quietly as any man could. "I have news for you, mistress, and I need food and drink."

"What news?" I asked. There was a simplicity about him that I could feel. He would not lie to me, I thought.

He gave me his news, simply again. "Your master is recovered of his fever and is well."

"My master?" I said.

"Captain Bland," he said. "It is all fevers and agues, mistress, with us now."

"And he is well you say?" I asked again.

"His man, William James, and I tended him when he was sick," he said. "He is well enough."

I enquired after my uncle and my cousin John. They, also, it seemed, were well.

"You left them," I said, something of despair about me for a second. "You came away."

He laid a hand on my arm. "I have a life to lose as much as any Duke of Monmouth has. But, mistress, it was not that. I could not stand the rain."

From the pity I felt for him I brought him food and drink from the private store my aunt and I kept within the house. I did so in great fear of being heard. But the night was kind; the household and the Lieutenant slept; nothing stirred, the shadows

among which I moved were like dark water spilled upon the grass.

The food I brought warmed the stranger; the wine — I had been unwilling to draw off the small beer from the cask in our back kitchen for fear of waking the Lieutenant's men — loosened his tongue.

He spoke familiarly of the Duke as countrymen speak of their masters, giving him no title and no name. "He will never," he said, "take Bristol now."

I encouraged him to tell me more.

"We came into Keynsham," he said, "from Peynsford, six miles away. Keynsham Bridge over the Avon was down, wrecked by the King's men. They had been there before us as we might have known they would and gone on again. So Captain Tyler and those of us who were builders built it up once more. We toiled all night in the pouring rain, only the light from the fires our men lit to guide us, and the feel of the stones. By daybreak the bridge stood, and we crossed over and rested within sight of Bristol's walls on Sydenham Mead. Bristol folk sent us welcoming messages — "Come in. Come quickly." But the Duke of Beaufort and the King's militia were drawn up and waiting, too, outside the walls. That did not worry us much. They were West Country men like ourselves — we knew that. They would have deserted to us soon enough, we reckoned, if we had been so brave as to come on. But we don't come on. No, back we come to Keynsham to eat our suppers and say our prayers. We should have need of both, Captain Tyler tells us, if we aimed to attack that night. But we don't attack. Instead, Oglethorpe's Dragoons come charging down on us in Keynsham's streets. We drove them back, and that was the first taste o' victory we ever had. And it was sweet. We even took some prisoners for questioning. And then — that seemed queer to us, mistress, mortal queer — we went on doing nothing, just waiting.

"All at once it was right about turn once more and the road again. That we should turn back now with Bristol folk waiting for us and only Beaufort's militia between us and them was past our fathoming. More downhearted than we had ever been we took the road to Wiltshire by way of Phillips Norton and

Frome, in mud halfway to our knees, in the pouring rain and the pitchy dark." He paused.

"And then?" I said. I drew him to the leese of the summer-house where we could not be seen.

"And then?" I said again, for though his tale was long I wished to hear the end.

"I fell in the mud, mistress," he said simply, "I very near drowned in it. While I rested by the wayside the thought came to me, 'Stay where you are. Don't move.' " He turned his head towards me. "God's truth, I meant no harm. It was like someone else talking. The rest of our men went past me like shadows, all stumbling. But I was spent." He straightened. "I reckon *he's* spent too." Once more he did not give the Duke a name. He turned from me, looking first this way, then that like a man lost within himself. Then, suddenly it seemed to me again, the mist swallowed him and he was gone.

I reached my room thankfully. Not until I was safely there did I begin to see how reckless I had been to put all our lives into a deserter's hands. While I turned and tossed in my bed and knew no peace a small wind, absent throughout these sultry days, stirred and the iron hook that held my casement window jerked and creaked again. It was a sound I loved, one I was accustomed to hear in happier times before I fell asleep. I heard it gratefully once more and slept again.

I woke to the same troubled thoughts. But now I marshalled them, I took command. Quite simply I resolved to seek out Captain Julian and unburden myself to him. I set out confidently to cover the short distance between our house and that of Captain Julian at the other end of the Cob. Even at this early hour the town was full of bustle and noise. A line of waggons, several King's men in charge, was being loaded with provisions outside Master Dyer's shop on the corner as I passed. Master Dyer, I thought, laboured harder than he need have done to fill the waggons and to rob himself. A number of Dragoons were busily shaving themselves around the town pump; others, legs sprawled, were cleaning their muskets and filling their powder horns. An officer's gentleman threw a leather travelling trunk spotted with mould into the street from an upstairs window,

calling out as he did so to the fellow who waited below that it must be cleaned, and quickly too. Only when my hand reached up to lift the bronze knocker on Captain Julian's door did the significance of so much bustle come home to me.

Clearly the King's men were moving out of Lyme. Where were they bound? When, I asked myself, would they return?

While Mistress Julian's hands were fumbling at the chains that held the door I could hear Captain Julian's heavy feet clattering down the wooden stairs. In tasselled nightcap, his feet thrust hastily into leather sea boots, he let me in.

At once he greeted me. "What is it now? I swear by the look of you that you have done something you should not ha' done."

In a small candle-lit room, with the door shut and the curtains drawn, I told him a part of what I had to tell while Mistress Bathsheba stood behind us, nervously plaiting and unplaiting her apron strings.

It appeared that Captain Julian liked nothing of what he heard. "I'll not stand by you," he declared. "You lack discretion. You are ungovernable." So suddenly, I thought. "A week ago," he went on while I stayed dumb, "you must send me word, mighty inconveniently as it happened, that you dare receive no more messages because of the Lieutenant's anger. And now, Lieutenant or no, you dare go out to this man (when you might just as well ha' stayed indoors), and have speech with him and feed him too. One who is not only the King's enemy but a deserter from our own folk also."

I defended myself. "I had no time to think."

"It is not your way to think," the Captain said. "To speak truly, Mistress Bathsheba and I are no longer certain of you. We can never tell what you will be at. You have cast off John and taken up with another, and now there is talk of you all over the town with a third, and a King's man at that."

"I marvel," I returned hotly, "that you and Mrs Bathsheba should listen to such evil tales, except that folk everywhere do always love them best. It was my uncle that bade me come to you in anything that might concern my aunt. But I'll trouble you no more."

As I turned to go he caught at my arm. "Hold,

Deborah, can you not stand plain talk?"

"Yes," said I, "but not plain lies."

"Nay, Deb," he said uncomfortably, "nay, you've no cause to discharge a broadside at me. Be honest now. Confess you have endangered all our lives."

"I have endangered my own." I spoke impatiently, for truly I wished only to be gone. "Tell me what you would have me do?"

At once Captain Julian laid his commands on me. They were not new. I was to succour no-one, assist no-one among our men, whoever they might be.

What of my uncle, I thought, and John, and Oliver? Must I do nothing, I asked, if need arose, for them? Would Captain Julian himself refuse to succour them?

"Wait and see, mistress," he said testily. "Wait and see. But now, straight and plain, I'll tell you this. I'll do what I can, but I'll never throw away two lives for the sake of one, I'll show no preferences."

You will do nothing for Oliver, I thought — that is what you mean.

At this point Mrs Bathsheba who had been fidgeting with the candle snuffers for the last few seconds dropped them nervelessly. Her brother picked them up. "What more did you learn from this deserter?" he asked.

I reported what I had heard of Keynsham and the rest. "The man could see no reason why the Duke should withdraw from before Bristol," I said.

"Ah," said Captain Julian, "your fellow could not know of the ill news the Duke had learned from the prisoners he took at Keynsham. That the three English regiments loaned to the Prince of Orange were home again. Worse still, that my Lord Feversham and the King's men were no further away than Bath, while my Lord Churchill was on the march from Wells, hemming them in."

I cried out at that. "Then the West may indeed, as everyone feared, prove a cage."

Captain Julian turned on me. "Who else has been talking to you?"

"No-one," I said. "No-one, unless it was Mary Blake. Where

will they go?" I asked, "What will become of them?"

"I would not tell you if I knew." The Captain turned his back.

Mrs Bathsheba took my hand. As if she were a child she trotted beside me to the door. A basket of eels — unnoticed by me when I came in — had spilled themselves upon the passageway and left their trails of slime upon the stones. Hands clasped, we stepped over them. Grown freakish suddenly, Mistress Bathsheba thrust me from her.

So, in mistrust and misunderstanding we parted. Not many days ago Mistress Bathsheba would have pressed flowers, short-stemmed as if a child had picked them, into my hands, Captain Julian would have been glad to kiss my cheek. Resentment and hurt feelings struggled within me as I came away. I was reminded of things well meant on my part but not well done. Most of all I was aware of kindness and affection lost. I had always believed that Captain Julian was my friend. How mistaken I had been! He cared only for John. Because of John he would do nothing, I told myself again, for Oliver or for me.

That evening, tired of the day and my own thoughts, I went early to my room and encountered the Lieutenant once more upon the stairs. Not even the late June sun setting over Gold Cap was more splendid than he appeared in his uniform of scarlet and white and gold. His fair hair — he wore no wig — shone; he held a new gold-braided hat in the crook of one arm. Over the top of it he smiled at me. He was not sorry, I am certain, to be admired.

I might have passed with no more than a word if he had not obliged me to speak.

"I am off to *The George*, Mistress Deborah," he said, "to drink far too many loyal healths to King James. I wish I might persuade you to drink one with me."

"Not one," I said.

He teased me for the third time. "I had hoped we might forget the differences between us."

"There are too many of them," I said, "and they cut too deep."

"Then we are back where we started, would you say?" Not

altogether mischievously this time he smiled.

"That is not possible either." My voice trembled as I spoke.

He drew nearer me in concern. "I have provoked you, I fear, most unkindly. Only now, Mistress Hawkesley, do I see that you are not yourself. Will you not tell me why?"

The Julians and not only the Julians in mind, I answered him. "I do everything so ill."

He stooped to me. "I am in a worse case, Mistress Deborah, I do assure you. When I am with you I come near to forgetting everything."

"Do not think of me," I begged him. "Do not."

He straightened. "I am and always shall be your faithful friend and humble servant, Mistress Hawkesley." He went past me for a stair or two, then turned back. "Or do you forbid that also?"

Before ten of the clock the next morning, to the same sound of drums and fifes, to the jingle of bits and the trundle of waggon wheels the King's men, like the Duke's men before them, marched away.

9

A DARKENED HOUSE

FROM this time onwards only rumours reached us. We resisted them, both good and bad, and yet they slipped as though by stealth into our minds — that London had risen, that an army of clubmen were waiting in Wiltshire for the Duke, that the Southern Irish were plundering Bridgwater for King James, that the French army King Louis was said to have promised the King was on its way.

Between belief and disbelief we found no certainty anywhere; we trod as it were, on quicksand. The weather, never absent from our minds since the rains began, continued in a sultry sort of fashion to serve King James. Though it no longer rained grey

thunder clouds covered the western sky, no wind stirred and every foul smell the town was subject to hung as though suspended in the air.

Not surprisingly a new sickness fell upon us all. It gave little warning. You were well in the morning and ill at noon. For three days and nights a fever racked your bones: when it went it left you weaker than a child. Everyone, however patient they had been before, complained now as if complaining brought relief. Indeed, towards the end of June Lyme was changed from a cheerful bustling town into a heavy and dismal place. Though our lives moved to so new a tune we behaved in every outward fashion as if nothing had changed. The fishing boats put out and returned again; the shops opened their shutters and displayed their wares; the children, hand in hand, went punctually to school; the town clock was wound; the weekly market held. If many market men were absent their womenfolk were there, bounteous as feather beds behind the stalls.

On this particular day it had fallen to me, Clarice being busy elsewhere in the town, to do the marketing. While I paused uncertainly before the mounds of butter and the rows of plump trussed fowls and the small Cheddar cheeses wrapped in rhubarb leaves that graced Mistress Barber's stall, Clarice returned and laid a hand most urgently upon my arm.

I went with her. By the china stall which was empty of customers and almost empty of wares, she told me what she had learned, that Janey, William Cox's wife, was delivered of twins and one was dead, and that William, by special permission of the Duke, was in Lyme. He wished, Clarice said, to speak to me if he might.

I left the market as quietly as I could. William was waiting for me in the kitchen of my uncle's house, a sealed packet of letters ready in one hand. He thrust the packet towards me. "There's two for the Master's wife. And one, Mistress Deborah, for you from Captain Bland."

"And they are well?" I asked.

"We are all well," William said, "though it was bad news and no mistake we heard at Frome."

"What news?" I spoke anxiously. For I had heard nothing of

what had passed at Frome.

"The letters'll tell you," William said, "better than I can, or maybe they won't. It's all over with Argyl and Rumbold in Scotland — we know that now, The King's men, it seems, have held them prisoner this long while — happen they're dead by this time though we're not certain of that. And the King's men under Feversham and Churchill are all joined in one army now. So to-day, or tomorrow or the next day it'll come to a finish between us and them. It's bound to . . ." He stooped to pick up the cloak and haversack he had with him which he had placed beside his chair. "And a good thing too," he said. "I wish it was over. That's all." He faced me. "Will you keep an eye on my Janey, mistress, if I don't come back?"

Helpless for a moment, I looked at him. "Must you go, William?"

"I have sworn to it, mistress," he said, turning away, "and I must."

I gave him food and money for his journey and a packet of letters I had saved up for just such an opportunity as this, I shook his hand, I wished him well. In a few moments William also was gone.

The letters he had brought carried the same message of the battle that could no longer be avoided, that would be fought any day now.

John attempted to jest or half jest, in his letter. Since it was written somewhere, he wrote, that men must be heroical he was resolved to be as heroical as the rest. . .

My uncle was chiefly concerned to make his farewells. 'Forgive me,' he wrote to my aunt, 'for the sorrow I have brought you in this adventure of ours; comfort yourself with the thought that our Cause is just. And so, my only love, my heart's dear, I bid you Good Night.'

Oliver wrote like a man lifted most strangely above himself. 'From Phillips Norton to Frome we waded in mud and water so deep I feared it might destroy us all. But now the sun shines, it is all clear day and we go on to Bridgwater and beyond to keep the Cause alive.'

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Two days after William's visit my aunt sickened of the fever that by this time was afflicting almost every family in Lyme. I tended her through all the hours, laying cool cloths wrung out in vinegar and water upon her head, and marvelling as I did so that they should dry so soon. Sometimes, from standing so long beside her bed, performing always the same motions, I felt as if I were asleep.

One night in the early hours I was pricked wide awake. Sitting up in bed, my aunt raved so unlike her gentle ordered self I feared for her reason and even for her life. I have never believed in visions, whether of this world or the next; I have always told myself they can be no more than the disordered fancies of the brain. But when my aunt raved as she did now of a marshy moor, criss-crossed by water channels and men fighting and dying there, I was filled with dread.

"Do you not see them," she asked, stabbing a forefinger into the dark, "there, there, by the water channels and the cornfield?"

I drew the curtains back from the window. "Oh, my dear," I said, "my dear, see! Nothing has changed. No-one is there." The down stretched away, empty of everything but shadows.

"But Deborah," she said most quietly then, "*I know* that they are there."

Towards morning she slept, but slept so lightly she appeared not to breathe at all. I watched beside her through all the hours while the sun rose most gloriously, and a little leaping wind seemed to bring in the dawn. Only then, Clarice having taken my place, did I go to my own room.

I woke late to find Dinah, swinging both feet and looking down at them, seated expectantly upon my bed.

"Is to-day Thursday or Thirsty?" she demanded.

I thought for a moment before I answered her. It was the sixth of July, I remembered sleepily. "To-day is Thursday," I said.

She swung her legs again so that the bed creaked. "I wish I might go out."

"Why, so you shall," I promised her, "if I am free to come with you."

She slipped from the bed, giving a small sideways twitch to her gown, which was a shade too long for her, as she did so. "To Gold Cap?" she enquired.

* * *

I walked beside her presently over the high down towards Gold Cap, over the short springing turf and the drifting shadows of the clouds and the seagulls' wings. Around me was the daylight world I knew, of sun and sky and summer flowers, the spotted orchis we had come to pick, the wild thyme full of bees, the clumps of mallow, blue and purple as the sea below, that overhung the cliff. A kestrel mounted dizzily within sight, the quaker grasses rustled as the wind stirred, a distant plume of smoke from no chimney that I could see as yet showed faintly upon my left against the sky.

I was aware of all this and yet I could not dismiss the vision my aunt had shown me from my mind. I halted as I had halted before when the Duke's ships sailed first into Lyme Bay, in much the same place. I had been fearful then, but now my fears took all but solid shape. If the Duke's Cause were lost who would befriend us? I asked. How should we contrive to live when all my uncle's goods were forfeit to the King? No-one who has been safe and sheltered always can begin to know the panic that seized me then. It was like a sudden darkness before my eyes, a lightness in my brain.

Dinah came towards me, a ladybird imprisoned in one hand. "Shall I kill it?" she asked.

I bent over her. "No, let it live."

"Gramercy would have let me kill it," she said. She came on a step or two very deliberately. "Where is Gramercy now?"

Where indeed? I thought. I opened my mouth to answer, then, on a sudden recollection shut it again. Just such another plume of smoke as that upon my left, I remembered, had shown day in, day out from old Roger Denham's farmhouse at Starvecrow while he lived. But old Roger was dead. He had died nine months or more ago. Since that time, for all I knew to the contrary, the house had been empty, the land given over to docks and nettles and

spreading weeds. My uncle had pointed the place out to me over a year ago when he and I were riding over the down and had halted very near this same spot. "Old Roger," he had said, "owes me a hundred guineas for his share in that ship of Captain Julian's and mine that went down off Ushant in the last October gales. He says I may have the farm if I like in settlement of his debt when he is gone. I think I will. Wouldst like it for thy own, Deb? Poor place though it is?"

"I'll have it gladly," I said. "And be thankful too." For it would be something, I had thought then, penniless as I was, to have any place that I could call my own. So it had been arranged. The deeds, I reminded myself, hung about with great red seals, were locked away in the small chest with the rest of my uncle's papers and the store of gold coins he had entrusted to me when he went away.

I had thought no more of Starvecrow. But now, suddenly, I remembered all that my uncle had told me of the place. I looked again. The plume of smoke rose more plainly now into the quiet air. Dinah tugged at my hand. I disregarded her; I felt certain now. Where was Gramercy? she had asked. Why not at Starvecrow? I thought. Where else could she have gone when the Lieutenant banished her from Lyme? It was isolated and empty; it was near at hand and it was mine. For all these reasons it could be our place of refuge also.

Excited and strangely moved, I turned back. At once Dinah reproached me. "You promised we might go to Gold Cap."

"Some other time," I said. I stooped to her. "Little love, I must find Gramercy. I must go to her."

She stared at me. "Why must it always be some other time? I do not like some other time."

"Dear heart, I do not like it either," I said.

* * *

Having entrusted my aunt who was still far from well to Clarice and left Dinah with them both I set out on the next day to cover the six miles or so to Starvecrow. The day stayed fine, the larks mounted and sang, the brown honey bees and the butterflies tossed up as though for joy over the flowers. It was twelve

noon when my pony, Lightfoot, and I left Lyme; it was close on two before I came in sight of the farm.

I had not been mistaken. Gramercy herself, her white apron blowing in the wind, one hand shading her eyes, appeared to be waiting for me on the steep ridge behind which, in its own hollow, Starvecrow lay.

She came to meet me. I found her sleek and mightily assured. At once, as if nothing remarkable had happened, she challenged me: "When did it cross your mind to look for me here?"

"Until yesterday I had no notion where you might be," I said.

"And no thought of me either, I'll be bound," she returned. "Not that I want to be thought of," she declared. "We do well enough."

'We,' I thought. Was Jasper at Starvecrow then? Very soon I should know. I looked about me as Gramercy and I came on. Viewed in the broad light of day Starvecrow appeared to me to be a derelict sort of place set in a wilderness of weeds. Giant thistles stood stiffly everywhere like halberdiers; the trees in the orchard near the house were weighed down with honeysuckle trails and ropes of ivy leaves. The house itself, half hidden in its forest of weeds, was no better than a poor man's barn. Round clumps of stonecrop thrust out of the broken thatch, no windows showed, the only door appeared nailed and barred. A few hens leaner than greyhounds stepped delicately between the docks, a goose, all regal-white, sat on a steaming dunghill quite alone; a rough moorland pony tethered to a post whinnied sociably as we drew near. On closer acquaintance I saw that the plume of smoke I had followed did not come from the chimney of the house itself but from a tarred and timbered hut close by.

Gramercy flung the door of the hut wide. As she did so the sleeve of a man's jacket which hung behind it on a peg swung out and in again.

"'Tis Jasper's," Gramercy said. "Come in."

The place was bare and clean — no dust or dirt ever stayed with Gramercy long. A fire of logs burned smokily on a rough hearth of stone, an iron pot was suspended over them. I took swift note of everything I saw: the double bed in a box frame

that leaned against one wall; the trestle table flanked by two stools on the other side, a rushlight or two in iron holders upon one wall, a shelf laden with two pewter pots and a brown slipware jug.

Gramercy set the jug of milk before me and a cake of bread. "There's nothing to make us fat here," she declared, "but we don't starve."

I wondered how she came by the cow — it was cow's milk I drank — and what I should say to her, and how I should begin. I had not expected any show of affection on her part but the new surge of confidence she displayed continued to astonish me. I marvelled that love, or the motions of love she had gone through with Jasper (who was breathing hard like a spaniel dog behind a second door), should have achieved so much.

While I struggled with my thoughts she spoke confidently again. How was that lanky Corporal, the Lieutenant's man?

I reproached her. "Gramercy, do you not know the trouble we are in?"

"Trouble," she repeated, her face hardening. "What's that to me? I've been in trouble often enough and never found a living soul to come to my rescue." She shook back her head.

I began to drink the milk she had given me. Why should I plead with her? I thought. Was not Starvecrow mine?

She spoke sulkily as if she read my thought. "Go on about the trouble you are in."

"I will," I said.

I told her of the failure of our men before Bristol and the retreat to Bridgwater; I related a part of what William Cox had said.

She interrupted me. "That freckle-face! What does he know?"

For a moment I was vexed with her. "Why must you despise everyone, Gramercy?" I asked.

"I don't. Not always," she said. "And not everyone neither. And if I do, why shouldn't I? I reckon I'm better than most folk, even if they don't know it." I did not speak. "You will say I ought to prove it," she went on. "But I can't. That makes it worse." Some sort of hurt showed for a moment on her face.

I spoke warmly. "I shall say nothing of the kind. And you

know you may stay here as long as you please. I have not come to send you away."

"I've no right here," she said. "I know that." She spoke sulkily again. "If you don't wish me to leave, why have you come?"

I told her why. "I do not expect you to care what may become of me," I said. "But there is my aunt, there is Dinah also. I cannot fend for them alone."

"You would not do so badly by them," Gramercy allowed grudgingly. She turned sharp at once. "You still have not said what you want."

"Stay at Starvecrow," I said, "both you and Jasper. If the battle goes against the Duke send me word that we may come to you."

"I'll send Jasper," she said.

I raised my voice. "He has failed us once. Would he not fail us a second time?"

"I never failed you," Jasper declared, coming out as I had known he would from behind the door. "I never failed anybody yet."

"Have you not failed Clarice?" I asked.

"No, that I have not," he said. "She had had enough o' childbearing, she said, and she put me to sleep on the floor. And I wasn't having that. 'Tis against the Scriptures and mortal cold as well. And I had no mind to go off with the Duke. I never did see any sense in soldiering, so I came away."

"And saved your skin," I said.

"It's mine," Jasper said and brushed past.

Gramercy came with me to the door. "He's a poor tool," she declared, "and I'll not keep him. But I'll send him to you, as I promised."

On the brow of the ridge where we had met we parted. I looked back for a second at the tarred hut and the twisted trees in the orchard and Gramercy herself, standing motionless on the ridge, her face (as I expected) turned from me.

The sun was setting when I returned. The wind had dropped; a stillness lay everywhere about the town; every house appeared darkened; no-one stirred. I made what haste I could to my

uncle's house. That, too, showed dark.

Dinah, legs straddled, stomach thrust out, was standing before our kitchen fire while Clarice bathed her brood. Naked as they were born, the five of them showed rose-pink and gold. One twiddled a finger in his ears, another wept and from tiredness pulled at his hair. Vast and white, Clarice was on her knees beside a round bath tub.

Dinah encouraged her. "Do you be sure to wash behind *all* their ears, Clarice," she said and paused. "But I'll not have you wash behind mine."

A heaviness about me that not even Dinah could dispel, I came away.

It was quiet on the cliff top, but not quiet enough. A horseman heading in the direction of Charmouth came galloping post-haste over the down. With a kind of dread I looked after him. What news was he carrying? Where was he bound? I hurried back. Captain Julian's ship, the *Margaret*, was tied up at the quay. In expectation of any news he might have brought I ran towards the Julians' house. All along the quay people thrust open their windows at the sound of my running feet, then closed them again. A fisherman spoke to me out of the dusk. "What news, mistress?" I answered him, "None that I know of yet," and ran on.

From the open door Captain Julian beckoned me in. He spoke harshly. "The battle's lost. Fought to a finish last night on Weston Moor. Begun in the dark and all over at the coming of the day. A thousand of our men dead and your uncle with them. You'll have no-one to stand by you now."

No-one, I thought. I did not move from where I stood, nor speak.

"God has forsaken us," he said. "It's past our fathoming." The tears, most painful to see, ran down his cheeks.

In the parlour on the other side of the passageway Mistress Julian, hands folded, eyes closed, sat quietly in her chair. She had done with trouble, she seemed to say. And yet, I thought, and yet — only trouble was here.

"What of John?" I asked at last. "What of Oliver Bland?"

"I know nothing," Captain Julian said. "Nothing at all.

For all that you'll have to wait."

I almost whispered now. "If they come back, will you take them to safety? Will you have them on board the *Margaret*?"

He spoke harshly again. "I'll use my discretion. I'll take whom I can and whom I please."

You will take John, I thought. Overcome by the harshness of the Captain's manner and by all that I feared and felt I sat down. As I did so the remembrance of all that I had promised my uncle came flooding back. It was impossible, I thought, impossible for me to do so much. This was my first acquaintance with sorrow and the burdens that sorrow brings. For a moment I could not help but weep. "Who will tell my aunt?" I asked. "For I cannot," I said, my hands before my face.

Captain Julian bent over me. "You cannot, or you will not? Then I will." He clapped his hat on his head and stumped out.

Mistress Julian sat beside me now, smoothing my hand between her bent fingers, timidly. "Trouble comes," she said, "no-one knows why. Trouble comes and passes."

I kissed her cheek, so seamed and cold; I came away. I could hear the tide coming in upon my right in the half dark and the slow churn of the pebbles upon the shore. Except for an old woman gathering pieces of driftwood and dropping them from nerveless fingers and picking them up again, the quay was empty. Gradually, by what means I do not know, my mind steadied and grew clear. I had been near running away from all the problems that beset me. Now I ran hot-foot to meet them.

10

THE BATTLE AND THE MOOR

THERE was little sleep for us on that night of July the seventh, the first full night after the Battle, little sleep anywhere for many hundreds of families throughout the West, in Bridgwater and Bridport, in Shepton Mallet and Frome, in Taunton and Exeter

and the great port of Bristol itself. We had watched and waited all day to no purpose. Towards dusk people closed their shutters and barred their doors; no-one stirred abroad. Someone, I remember, as a sign of mourning, rang the chapel bell. Its clamour ceased and then all noise seemed stilled, except for the sound of digging that was occasionally to be heard as King James's supporters uncovered their treasures while our own people made haste to bury theirs away.

My aunt mourned within her room, coming out in her night-gown only now and then to ask if any further news had come of my uncle, and if John were here. Wherever I went my cousin Dinah followed as if she could not bear to have me absent from her sight; more often than not our cat Sophy accompanied her, miaouwing as piteously as if the dread that filled both our minds troubled her also.

After dusk the first stragglers began to arrive. In ones and twos they slipped silently into their own houses. Footsteps, dragging or over-quiet, could be heard in the street. They would halt suddenly. Doors would open and shut again, a lighted candle would be seen for a moment between the chinks of the closed shutters and then, as suddenly, it would be snuffed out. From our garden's end I believed I could glimpse other figures of men moving over the down. How could they live? I thought. Who would succour them?

I had everything in readiness for Oliver and John should they return. I had set out food and wine for them, clean linen, plain suits of clothes and boots. I had counted out for their use a small part of the store of guineas my uncle had left with me; I had two horses, saddled and bridled, waiting in the cellars beneath the house. Surely, I told myself childishly, surely, now that all was in readiness for them they would not fail to come.

I waited at our garden's end and no-one came. The July lilies spread their perfume abroad, the sea swung silvered and smooth against the shore, the western sky that had been rose and flame turned to blue-green and the pair of swallows that had nested in the eaves of our house every year since I could remember ceased their small bubbling song. And now the silence changed. Empty

before, it became filled with scarcely audible sound. I listened again. The latch of the wicket gate lifted at last and Oliver, swaying upon his feet, stood there.

I had no words with which to greet him. We held each other, and that at first was speech enough after what seemed an eternity of waiting. Afterwards I did all I could to make him whole, broken in body and in spirit as he was and battle-soiled. And nothing I could do for him appeared enough. Within the shelter of the house I dressed a deep sword cut in his thigh; I gave him food and wine. I let him bath himself before our kitchen fire, I helped him dress since from weariness he could not help himself. I washed his hair, clotted as it was with blood and dirt. When all this was done he laid his head between my breasts and rested there. And then I knew what I must do. I slipped my gown from off my shoulders and laid him in my bed and held him in my arms. I remember to this day the feel of his hair, crisp and dry and sweet-smelling from the bath, under my lips. From weariness he slept and I, at last, slept too.

When he stirred I woke, and then I heard him say, heavily and most unlike himself, "William Cox" — from this I guessed that William had escaped with him — "William Cox said that he must go to his wife. I told him I wished I might come to mine."

I said, "Am I not here?"

I felt him tremble as he leaned over me. "What if harm comes to you because of me? What if I leave you with a child?"

I put my arms about him and drew him to me. "What harm can come? Do you think I would not have your child?"

So we were lovers. How could it be otherwise between us, broken as he was and needing to be healed, and wanting me?

Presently he talked not of me, nor of himself, but of the battle. It was broken talk. Afterwards I wrote it down. I need not have done so, for I can hear it still.

"What comfort can a man hope to find," he asked, "when the fight goes against him? I think the only comfort he can find lies within himself.

"I wish I might tell you the truth of what I know. But I cannot. I saw only a part of the battle. The rest may never be told since so many of those who might speak are dead, while

those that live on will be silenced.

"Our cause was lost, I feel, from the beginning. All that we did was so ill thought out, so unprepared. From the time the weather broke some strange bewitchment appeared to fall upon us all: our judgment failed us and our will; we went here, we went there; we dared decide on no one course for long.

"At Bridgwater, where we came from Frome for the second time, we were almost in despair. We could not winter in the town as we had hoped for no-one any longer desired our company. To turn towards Bristol a second time, as the Duke thought of doing, appeared most hazardous; to fight at once on my Lord Feversham's terms with the King's army no more than four miles away on Weston Moor was, it seemed to us, to invite defeat.

"While we hesitated, as sick at heart as men can be, a messenger from the country round about the village of Chedzoy and Weston Moor came to us, as though he were sent by Heaven itself. He was so simple as to be almost half-witted, some poor girl's bastard, it was said, and a herdsman on Weston Moor. While this Richard Godfrey (for that was his name), tended his cows on the moor he had seen the King's infantry taking up their positions on the open ground north of the village of Weston Zoyland on the edge of Weston Moor. The King's cavalry, he said, were billeted a little way off in the village of Weston itself.

"At once the possibility of a night attack upon the enemy across the open moor presented itself temptingly to our minds. 'Why,' we asked, 'should we not surprise and defeat the King's infantry before his cavalry from Weston village have time to come to their aid?'

Were the enemy entrenched? we asked Godfrey. No, he said. We sent him off to the Moor to make certain. In the afternoon of the same day, the fifth of July, he returned. No, he swore most positively again, no, the enemy were not entrenched.

"At once our hopes soared. By secrecy and silence and surprise we might yet succeed, if fortune favoured us, if the fates proved kind. We were too confident once more: fortune had never favoured us, nor had the fates proved kind. We forgot the Moor. It was no man's friend. The enemy — we were ignorant of this also — had no need of entrenchments where

they stood. The Bussex Rhine, one of three deep drainage ditches that cross the Moor served them better than any entrenchment could. Filled with water in some places, with deep mud in others, bordered and even choked at intervals with dense growths of thorn, it was impassable for cavalry and almost impassable for infantry.

"It could be crossed — we understood that when we set out — by two narrow bridges only. Both crossings were known only to Godfrey; both as far as we were concerned must be looked for in silence and in the dark. God bless Godfrey, I thought. God guide us all. That is what I thought. But I said nothing. I was guilty there."

I clung to him. "Why must you speak of guilt now?" I asked. "Finish," I begged him. "Tell all there is to tell since you must. And then, oh then, let us sleep."

"Truly," he said, "there is not much more to tell. At dusk on that same day of the fifth of July the drums sounded for us on Bridgwater's Castle Field; at eleven of the clock we set out. I remember the owls crying and the mists weaving about us under a constantly vanishing moon. Near a farm called Pusey Farm we struck off across the Moor. It was one of the clock when we did so and we were still two miles from our journey's end.

"Godfrey guiding us, we passed the Black Ditch, the first of the three drainage ditches between us and the enemy. We moved on towards the next, towards Langmoor Rhine. The mist lay everywhere about us as we rode on, the mist, I say, but there were waves of mist. They moved, they touched our faces, they slid past us as though they were alive. There was no stir of water about us, no wind in the sedges, no rustle of any creature in the night. We could hear only the muted sounds our people made — the jingle of harness, the breath of horses and the pull in the wet sockets of peaty ground of our men's feet. While Godfrey sought for the crossing of the Langmoor Rhine we waited, silently, and time ticked on. The crossing, we knew, was near a tall upright stone moorland folk called the Devil's Upping Stock. It was here, they believed, that the Devil mounted his horse when he took his nightly rides over the Moor. Devil's stone it was," Oliver said and paused, "for it had the Devil's own trick of vanishing.

"It was found at last. But just as the crossing was begun a pistol shot rang out from our front ranks. Who fired it no-one knows. If the shot was deliberate no treachery could have been greater, nothing could so soon have put an end to all our hopes. It was heard and answered. Almost at once we caught the sound of galloping hooves on the road as one of the enemy's Watchers on the Moor rode out to give the alarm. So there would be no surprise attack for us and — the conviction was borne in on us now — no victory."

Here Oliver paused for a second while I was reminded most miserably of the Welshwoman's prophecy — 'Between one pistol shot and another the Duke's Cause shall go down.'

"Only one faint chance remained to us," Oliver continued when I did not speak. "If my Lord Grey and our Regiments of Horse could cross the Bussex Rhine and make their way into the enemy's camp they might still work havoc there while the mass of our infantry came up. We made what haste we could with our cavalry, therefore, towards the Bussex Rhine. Already the enemy's camp on the other side was alive with movement — we could see the flutter of white shirts as the men ran here and there, and the bobbing of lantern lights; we could hear trumpet calls and shouts of command — 'To Arms, To Arms.'

"This was our moment, we told ourselves, there was time still. Once more it passed us by. Godfrey failed us again. We rode up and down the bank of the Bussex Rhine looking for the crossing and failing to find it and turning back to look for it again. Before us all was thick and pitchy dark, only black gleams of water to be seen and the denser blackness of the thickets of thorn. And all the while we were riding up and down like men spellbound we were aware of the King's men drawn up on the other side, quite still and waiting.

"They challenged us at last as they were bound to do. So the battle began. I hate to speak of what followed — it was comical to our enemies and hurtful and tragical beyond everything for us. Our horses, poorly trained and untried as they were, took alarm at the first volley and carried us, as if we had been yokels at a Fair, headlong out of the battle. We returned when dawn was breaking to find our men and the Duke with them fighting most

valiantly on one side of the Bussex Rhine, the enemy on the other. And this was madness too. Now that we could see our way it was necessary above all that we should no longer be content to fight with the Bussex Rhine between us and the King's men but should move closer in. We could not do so. Nothing, neither entreaties nor threats nor commands could persuade our men to move from where they stood as if the fear of drowning and the dark that had been with us for so long possessed us still.

"The Bussex Rhine still uncrossed between us and the enemy, we fought on. And then the fearful change that comes over every battle came to us also. To a thunder of hooves my Lords Churchill and Feversham and the King's Regiments of Horse from Weston Zoyland came riding in on both our flanks, driving our lines of infantry closer and closer in upon themselves. The six guns the King's Forces possessed dragged Lord knows how over the marshy ground, mowed us down in swathes. And we could not reply.

"Surrounded as we were, our ammunition almost spent, it was plain to every man among us that we must admit defeat. It was at this point that the Duke and my Lord Grey and a few companions chose quite privately to leave the battle. While they galloped off so secretly to safety and the Polden Hills their faithful infantrymen — farm hands and lead miners and woollen weavers and the rest — fought on." Oliver paused for a moment. "There must always be betrayals," he said. "So we were forsaken and betrayed."

He looked at me. "The rest is soon told. Those of us who remained came to a finish in the last hour before day. The end was too quick for thought, Deborah, and almost too terrible to bear. For now the King's infantry, held back so long, came at us with a shout most terrible to hear, storming over the Bussex Rhine, climbing in their thick buckskin breeches over the dense thickets of thorn, falling back but coming on again, ever again, muskets held high, wading in the thick water sometimes shoulder deep.

"They drove us fighting all the way back and still back, over the Langmoor Rhine to the cornfield beyond. Like King

Harold the Saxon's men at Hastings, that other field of blood, we fought there, side by side, while the King's Regiments of Horse, the infantry now in their turn held back, charged in and in again, and killed and killed and rode over us.

"So it is finished," Oliver said, "all that we did or tried to do is over now, like yesterday. And now I wish I might forget."

For a time I think he did forget. I also knew nothing for a while. Do not think we were deceived. Under the happiness that for a little while was ours a world of anguish lay. Oliver trembled as he slept while I lay wide awake. Even the shaft of sun that pierced the curtains of our bed seemed like a sword.

* * *

From this time onwards events bore down on us once more like chariot wheels.

His Grace of Monmouth and my Lord Grey had failed to find the safety they desired. The Duke had been captured near a place called Horton in Hampshire by Lord Lumley and the King's men and was now lodged within the Tower. He would die any day now, it was said.

Meanwhile the rumours of the King's vengeance that reached us grew to monstrous size, and yet they were not half as monstrous as the truth — that Colonel Piercy Kirke and a detachment of the Queen Dowager's Regiment of Tangier ill-fame were on their way to Lyme, that my Lord Chief Justice Jefferies had been appointed by King James to work his vengeance on the West.

The pattern of that vengeance was already plain. Colonel Piercy Kirke had hanged his prisoners after the battle to music and while they danced on air he had dined and wined. The Frenchman, my Lord Feversham, had hanged his prisoners, wounded or whole, in chains. No trial was allowed them. The laws of England had, it seemed, no more meaning for my Lord Feversham and Colonel Piercy Kirke than they had for His Majesty King James.

In my uncle's house my aunt and I waited anxiously for more certain news of him; we looked daily for news of John. Once more no news came. The days passed without zest or

meaning: the sun shone, the late butterflies flew everywhere about the flowers and yet the air seemed chill.

If the days were meaningless the nights brought the only happiness I had. For sometimes Oliver would come to me from his hiding-place upon the down and take what food and clothing I could give and all the love, and go again. I think he and I lived in those days for these stolen hours.

On the night of the fourteenth of July — the last night, though I did not know it yet, His Grace of Monmouth had to live — I sat in my uncle's kitchen, his writing tablet upon my knees. The fire of logs in our open hearth glowed under its white cloak of ash, the candles burned with still pear-shaped flames. I wrote busily, my quill pen spluttering upon the page, for I was intent upon setting down, as I remembered it, all that Oliver had told me of the Battle. To do so eased my mind and brought him strangely near.

I laid my pen down at last and wept a little for them all, and smudged a line and wiped the smudge away. I leaned forward now and swept the loose ashes back into the fire. What profit was there in anything, I thought, except in peace and love?

The door opened softly behind me: the writing tablet slipped from my lap and lay face downward on the floor. At once I was on my feet.

Not Oliver but John stood there. I stared at him. At once the gladness faded from his face as it had faded in the same moment, I did not doubt, from mine.

He paused, and then came further in. "You were expecting Oliver perhaps?"

"Truly," I said, "I am most glad and thankful from my heart that you are here."

"But if I were Oliver you would be gladder still." John stooped and picked up my uncle's writing tablet as he spoke. Straightening the crumpled pages, he laid it on a stool most carefully.

"So you two are lovers," he said. "Could you not wait?"

"No," I said.

I might have answered differently, I own, but the contempt I felt behind John's words angered me. I could never bear to be despised.

John's hand moved blindly over the table's edge as he spoke. "I'll not forgive you. No, nor Master Bland neither."

For an instant I saw Oliver's love and mine through John's eyes as a surrender to sinful flesh, an abandonment of all the lessons that John and I at least had learned. I would have pleaded with him, but one might as well sing a song to a kettle drum, I knew, as plead with John.

I defended myself hotly therefore. "Was I bound to you then?"

John turned away. "You were part of all the life I had to live. It is over now, and you are spoiled." I did not answer him for I could not. "When I lay hidden on the down," he said, "I thought of you. I told myself that you and I might marry after all, that we might at last do what my father wished. I thought we might speak to each other again, differently, of what was in my mind. But you could not wait."

"Do not judge us," I said. "Do not." I wept as I spoke. I would have pleased my uncle, I felt again, if I could. But no woman can please everybody.

John said, "I could weep too."

"At least tell me of your father," I begged him.

He answered me strangely. "He died of his wounds. Do not all men die so, of the wounds their friends deal them, of the wounds the world deals?" He smiled at me. "'Tis a most vile world when you see it plain."

Not all of it, I thought.

He went on. "You spoke of my father. I could not get to where he lay. There were five hundred of us, all prisoners, locked within Weston Zoyland Church after the Battle, packed close like human bales, good Englishmen in England, good Christian souls, our wounds undressed, no water given us to drink, no food and scarcely room to breathe, no other Christian soul, parson nor clerk nor verger, no woman neither, coming near. Though I escaped from the rope that bound me to half a dozen more I could not get to him for the bodies of the wounded and the dying and the dead that lay between him and me. It was like a parable of our two lives, for I could never come near him in life, however hard I tried. I was never — you know that — the

son he wished me to be, never the son after his own heart. I was my mother's son, and she thought only of him. Between the two I was lost, I belonged nowhere."

He turned towards the door. "I must go find my mother and speak with her. Unless" — he paused — "unless someone has been before me there also."

"Who could come before you with her?" I asked.

"Why, anyone," John said. "Our friend, Captain Julian perhaps. A man has only to be dead five minutes for another man to step into his shoes."

He left me for a while only to return as silently as he had come. "I could not tell her," he said, marvelling, "one half of what I knew. Is it not strange?"

"Your father shielded her," I said, "in everything."

"And now it is your turn?" John waited curiously.

"Yes," I said.

"Leave her to Julian," he said, moving off. "The Captain will have her anyway."

I came after him. "Will you not forgive us? Oliver, I know, would make amends if he could."

"If he could," John said. A look so calculating as to alarm me passed for a moment over his face. "There was always that streak of conscience in him," he said again as though thoughtfully, his hand on the door. "I may hold him to it. Tell him so."

So John came and went, taking his hurt with him and leaving me with one more cause for fear.

STARVECROW IN SIGHT

NO TIME was given me in which to brood. On the evening of the following day Mayor Alford and his friends returned to Lyme, riding into the town with a great clatter and stir towards dusk.

At once word went round that as a loyal King's man and a Justice of the Peace Mayor Alford had work to do. It was his duty to declare the houses and goods of all those families that had supported the Duke forfeit to King James. Even more than this, it was for him to take possession of them in the King's name. So Starvecrow, that desolate place, was at last in sight. Since my uncle was well-known for the part he had played in the rebellion my aunt and Dinah and I could not hope to escape. Nothing, it was likely, would be left to us of my uncle's warehouses and woollen goods, of house, or furniture, or land, nothing in fact of all that so short a while ago had been his. To the sorrow we must endure poverty of the most sudden and frightening kind would be added. No consolation was open to us except what we could find for ourselves, and no relief. We had possessed friends in plenty until the Battle, but now, mindful of themselves, our friends stood far off. We did not blame them.

My aunt, as I have said so often, had never any great notion of fending for herself in her happier days; now, from grief and distraction of mind she was past doing so. As my uncle had foreseen, it was left to me, ignorant and no more than half-grown as I was, to take charge.

For the first time since my uncle's death I scarcely knew where to turn. I was certain of one thing only, that we must salvage a part of our goods while there was still time, and that we must leave the town. I prayed that Gramercy would hear of Mayor Alford's return, that Jasper would not fail us, and that my aunt and Dinah at least might find safety at Starvecrow.

While I leaned my head on my arms on our kitchen table smelling of the rosemary and tarragon I had chopped upon it that morning as flavouring for a mutton pie, and sought to find some comfort for myself without the luxury of too much

despair, Jasper, nearer to a heavenly messenger than I had ever thought to find him, appeared.

He delivered his message briefly, as an angel should. Gramercy, he announced, said the time had come.

Bouncing up from where I sat, I hugged him warmly, three days growth of beard though there was upon his chin. I would have embraced Gramercy too if she had been there, though for me to have done so might have been as rewarding as if I had pressed a poker to my breast.

A hooded waggon, it seemed, waited outside, two horses in the shafts. And we must be very slippy, very speedy-like, Jasper said, for he must be gone before it was light. We set to work. Weary though I was, I found enough strength for two while Jasper, usually so languid, goaded himself and me to such good purpose that before morning our work was done.

We took first of all what appeared most necessary to us in the new life ahead. After that we carried away a few things for love, and a few more for pride to remind us when we felt low of what we had been and of what we might become again. Wisely, as was apparent afterwards, we took all our stores of food: our home-cured hams and bacon, great jars of honey and whole sugar loaves, cheese from Cheddar in Somerset, salted butter in wooden casks, small kegs of brandy and larger barrels of home-made wine. We conveyed away bedding and beds, plain tables and chairs, candle sconces and candles to go in them. Besides these we took tools of most sorts, pewter tankards and Lambeth pots, a needlework-covered stool for my aunt's feet, and, for luxury, three porcelain dishes (which I loved) with peacocks and Chinamen painted upon them, and half our clothes. My uncle's account books and private papers, the deeds of our house and of Starvecrow, together with all the money he had left with me, travelled in our plain oak chest.

At the last moment I laid my aunt's treasures in its four corners: her topaz necklace and her amber beads. Dinah's precious objects kept them company: her second-best doll my uncle had brought her from Amsterdam with the Dutch cap and the Dutch face, the little wheelbarrow of silver and of wood that served for salt and condiments as well, which she would push

about our long table by the hour when for some reason she was forced to stay indoors. My own possessions were so few I paid no great heed to them. I left my turquoise gown behind. It would suit Mayor Alford's daughter, Bertha, plump though she was, and serve to divert the Mayor's thoughts from other things of ours he would not find. The yellow petticoat that went with the gown I kept with me.

To content King James we left our house well-stocked with what was best of our furniture: the hangings brought from Italy, the embroidered pictures my aunt and I had made, good English silver, our best rugs from the Levant and my uncle's massive carved oak chair.

I worked all that night without too many regrets. Only afterwards did I find time to grieve for the things we left behind: Master Tompion's clock whose measured tick was like another pulse, the little swing mirror in the rosewood frame that was my own, the flowers on our cliff top garden that I loved — the tall white lilies, the striped red-and-white York and Lancaster roses, our bergamot and the red roses of Provence. Most foolishly I grieved to leave behind my uncle's bees. They seemed companions to the flowers. I had always loved the sounds they made and the way they had, when I spoke to them, of alighting harmlessly upon my hand.

When the waggon was filled I added two things more: my aunt's lute, so that it might make music for her still, and the portrait of her father, the old clergyman. I might not have done so if his eyes had not appeared to meet mine in the candlelight. You wish to come, I thought. Why, sir, you shall. Above his smooth white bands he had, it seemed to me, a gentle face.

But now Jasper, pulling at one ear fractiously, began to complain. "You'll break the horses' backs, mistress, if you do go on. And there'll be no room for me."

A knock sounded on our kitchen door as he spoke. I opened it while Jasper, in his careful fashion, moved behind our tall settle, out of sight.

A man shrouded in a tattered cloak thrust past me without a word and laid a long object wrapped in rags upon the

floor, and went out again.

Some instinct told me what I should find. Looking down at it, I said, "I think it is my uncle's sword."

Jasper unwrapped it gingerly. "See, mistress," he said, compassion in his voice, "'tis rusty here and there, this that was once so bright."

"Take it, Jasper," I said. "For that is all."

* * *

It was quiet, as always, on the cliff top where I had gone after Jasper left me. The clouds were closing in for rain, the hills showed grey. I turned from them and looked towards the sea.

And help seemed there. The *Margaret*, Captain Julian's ship, absent for three weeks since news came of the Battle of Weston Moor, lay at anchor close within shore.

I looked again. Her flag drooped at the masthead, her foretopsail hung loose from the yard, a trail of smoke from the galley funnel corkscrewed into the still air.

From the new hope of deliverance for our men that came to me at sight of her I could have laughed and cried in the same breath. She had returned, I did not doubt, with Captain Julian on board. She would set sail again, I was very sure, with her ordinary cargo and her usual crew. And more than her crew, I hoped, many more.

I would speak to Captain Julian, I resolved, I would discover for myself what plan, if any, for the rescue of some of our men he might have in mind.

Almost before it was light I was forestalled. No louder than a mouse and looking like one, Mistress Julian came scratching at our back door. In the candlelight her nose showed thin and sharp; her eyes seemed inky-dark. She put out both hands to me: they seemed like paws.

Once within doors she delivered her message briefly and sensibly. To-morrow, she said, both hands holding mine, to-morrow at high water the *Margaret* would sail again with a full cargo for Rotterdam. A boat, she went on, would put in at the cove on the other side of Lyme Bay towards Seaton, at the spot I knew where the woods came down to the sea and there were

steps came to the cliff. Did I remember the place? She paused, smiling a little, and somewhat out of breath.

I knew, I said. How many men would the *Margaret* take?

"Twelve," Mistress Julian said.

No more, I thought. With her ordinary cargo of woollen goods and her crew of eight the *Margaret*, I supposed, could take no more. Even so she ran great risk of discovery by the King's ships.

"How will Captain Julian decide whom to take?" I asked fearfully. "Will the men draw lots among themselves?"

I shut my eyes for an instant as I spoke. In imagination I could see the long line of them, waiting.

Mistress Julian nodded, twice, brightly. Yes, they would draw lots among themselves. Only twelve could go. She nodded again and squeezed my hand. "Providence," she said, "would guide."

12

OLIVER

THAT night, to his own great danger and mine, Oliver came once more from his hiding place on the down to our summerhouse at the garden's end. It was a night so perfect and so calm there seemed to be no cruelty in the world: the skies were light as day and strangely clear; the late lilies along our cliff path shed their perfume abroad; not a leaf stirred; the sea below us appeared as still as the moonlight on the grass.

I ran to Oliver as he came in by the wicket gate. "Come, smell the lilies," I said, "do they not smell sweet?"

I spoke too eagerly, I know, for I was lifted above myself with hope for him and for us all.

He answered me heavily. "I could smell them a hundred feet away."

I began to tell him, less eagerly, of Captain Julian's plans.

He cut me short a second time. "I know of

Only then did I remember how wearily he had been, how long a time his hands had been fumbling at the catch on our wicket gate.

I asked him, not altogether steadily, "Since the odds against us are so great, would you rather we did not hope at all?"

Within the shelter of the summerhouse, seated side by side on the couch that was all the furniture we had, I asked him again most tenderly, "What is it that troubles you?"

"Nothing," he said. "Or perhaps everything." I felt him smile at me. "You know very well what ails me, Deborah, or you would not ask."

"You have seen John," I said. "Why do you listen to him? Why? A little while ago he complained because he must marry me. Now he is cut to the quick because you and I have found each other."

"He counted upon us," Oliver said, "perhaps more than he knew, and we failed him. We both failed him."

"It is not his heart that suffers," I said hotly again. "It is his pride. Oh, you are softer than a woman to think and feel as you do."

Oliver spoke strangely. "Would you have me feel nothing then?"

"You think only of John," I said. "Could you not think of me?"

"Why, I do," Oliver said after a moment. "I think of you always, in the daytime and in the night also. Even when we are together I think of you. If everything were to come to an end for me to-morrow, because of you I think I might die content."

"Surely," I said and found it hard to keep from trembling, "surely, Captain Julian will make more journeys than one."

Oliver laid his arms about me for answer and drew me to him. "We will hope so. What more can we do? Let me tell you my dream."

"I am half sick of dreams," I said and clung to him. "They turn so soon to nightmares."

"Not this one," he said. "I dream always the same dream. That you come to me over a June meadow white with moon daisies and thick with flowers. You come so freely, so happily, as

if there were no danger for us anywhere in the world."

"Oh, God," I said, "are there no fields in Holland that I might meet you there?"

"What if I never reach Holland, Deborah?" he asked. "Even if I were safely there you could not come to me, I think. You could not leave your cousin Dinah and your aunt, Mistress Hawkesley."

"I had forgotten them," I cried. "I had forgotten them and all my promises."

Straightway, to divert his thoughts and ease my own I told him of my uncle's sword and how strangely it had been returned to us.

"So it has come home," Oliver said, "as I have done." And now once more he laid his head upon my breast.

What more, I thought, what more could any woman ask?

13

THE CHOICE

ON THE following evening I was at the place appointed by Captain Julian for our rendezvous where the trees run down to the cliff's edge and the steps begin that lead finally to the shore.

It was always a dim, eerie place full of sudden rushes of wind, and dense green silences. The night was misty; the moon shed little light; the tide, under a westerly wind, was full and comforting to hear, slapping and scuffling against the steps and the *Margaret's* boat waited, four men on board, a long dark shape by the shore.

Captain Julian waved me away roughly when I appeared. "Be off. Go home."

Since I had other commands within myself I dared not disobey I disregarded him. I moved out of his reach, and that was all.

He turned his back on me, and set a whistle to his lips and whistled twice. At first nothing happened. But then a rustling

could be heard within the wood. The bushes parted, the vague shapes that had been stationary in the mist between the trees came forward and were men.

Captain Julian beckoned. Hesitantly, in ones and twos they drew near.

Oliver was among the first to come forward. I stood beside him; I held his hand in mine while my eyes sought for John. I sought without success at first, and then my gaze lit on him not more than a few feet away. I started forward. Once more Captain Julian waved me back. This time, for fear of harming Oliver and myself, I obeyed.

And now I waited for what appeared to be an eternity of time while the twenty-eight men who had come together at Captain Julian's summons lined up in single file before him, and the business of drawing lots as to which of their number should take their chance of safety on board the *Margaret* was begun.

Only twelve could be taken, I reminded myself, only twelve. I continued to wait.

A high-crowned hat very like the one he had turned between his fingers when my uncle got away and the King's men came first to Lyme served Captain Julian's purpose now.

By the light of a darkened lantern held high he shook the hat up and down purposefully. The white slips of paper it contained leaped up and down like paper fish. Cropped head bent, bow legs straddled, the Captain held the hat unmoving now between his hands. The line of men moved forward. Only the first four faces showed in the lantern beams; the rest, until their turn came to move into the light, showed dark.

I watched while each man took out one of the paper slips, and looked at it, and then moved on. No more than a mere handful of them, slip in hand, lined up behind Captain Julian; the rest, the unsuccessful ones, stood to one side. Only twelve marked slips could be drawn, I knew, only twelve men, my mind repeated, could hope to get away.

I waited again. Ten men, each one of whom had drawn a place in the *Margaret*, stood behind Captain Julian now. With the addition of two more the *Margaret's* quota of fugitives would be complete.

The lantern light wavered and darkened as I pressed nearer, then steadied again, a moth caught helplessly within its beam. Four men waited their turn now, only four. Of these, I told myself again, two must be successful and two must fail. By an odd irony of circumstance I knew them all.

The highwayman whom Jasper and I had encountered on our way to Taunton was first in the line; William Cox came next; Oliver, with John immediately behind him, brought up the rear. They were the last. I took my eyes from them, I dared look no more.

A hare came bounding down the slope of the wood, then dashed to cover noisily. What had startled her? I thought in alarm.

I forced myself to watch once more. The highwayman took his slip and looked at it, then gave a triumphant Monmouth cock to his hat — God knows how he had preserved a hat for himself through all this troubled while — and stepped jauntily into place behind Captain Julian. William Cox, shoulders drooping, let his slip fall. Oliver gazed at his while I stepped nearer, and gazed at it again and made no move; John, from anger or despair, tore his in two. I saw the white fragments flutter and fall from his hand; I saw Oliver turn and look at him.

At once I knew this was the moment of sacrifice on Oliver's part I had foreseen and feared. I started forward again, only for the second time to be forestalled. At a signal from Captain Julian I was caught and held.

The moment, tense enough before, became fraught with danger now. A crashing of feet through the hazel and bramble thickets could be heard, lantern lights showed on the ridge, the cox'n's whistle sounded once in warning from the *Margaret's* boat waiting by the shore.

Captain Julian caught his ship's lantern up beneath his cloak; I struggled free. The sound of breaking twigs and plunging feet increased. I stood stock still, uncertain what to do or which way to take, and mortally afraid. Captain Julian and the twelve men who had lined up behind him were vanishing fast down the cliff steps towards the boat waiting by the shore; the rest, for the most part, had scattered and fled. Of them all, only Oliver with

William Cox pulling at his arm remained. Then they, too, were gone.

The wood filled with sounds and cries and trampling feet. I fled from them. I took the road I believed Oliver and William Cox had taken towards the open down. It was not wise of them, I thought as I sped on, it was not wise to go where every track and every path were known. And yet I followed them.

At first only the mist could be felt and seen, and the darker twisted shapes in the mist of blackberry thickets and thorn trees. Presently, unnoticed by me at first, this portion of the down filled again, as I had feared it might, with men. I was aware of blurred shapes dodging this way, then that, disappearing then appearing again, and a profusion of lighted lanterns moving swiftly here and there.

I stood still. In that brief space of time the King's men caught up with me. I cried out from fear to find them all about me in the mist, then clapped a hand to my mouth. In the next second I found myself seized roughly from behind, shaken and turned about. "That way," I heard, "that way."

The voice, I was certain, was the Lieutenant's voice.

Behind me, but not far off, the baying of hounds could be heard and the sound of more running feet. Stumbling and sometimes falling, I ran on. The sounds moved further away; the hunt moved off. When I paused to look back I found no comfort in what I saw. The lanterns had come together in a cluster on the high ridge of the down; the King's men, it seemed, were closing in like a pack of hounds for the kill.

I could bear no more. I threw myself face downward on the turf that smelled of toadstools and rabbit turds and rain. I beat my hands upon the ground; I cried out once more. And no one heard. The noises of the pursuit swelled and died again; the procession of lighted lanterns moved on to another place; the down once more grew still.

And I was alone as I had never yet been alone, and lost as I had never yet been lost, and running on once more from all that I felt and knew, from myself above all. As I ran I cried out a second time like a half-mad thing to the empty down and the unheeding powers and myself once more, that Oliver was taken

through my own fault, through my own fault I had lost my love. Because of me Captain Julian had left Oliver behind, because of me Oliver had given up his life to John.

How far my feet carried me afterwards I cannot say. Even distraction such as mine must have an end. By instinct, more than any conscious wish to save myself, I stopped short at last where the down fell abruptly away under my feet.

A road, what road I did not know, lay below. By some means I reached it. Too late my senses sent their message to my brain. The coaches I could not see in the mist, whose approach I had not heard, were on me before I was aware. I was thrust back by the foremost coach into the steep bank and almost swept under the side wheels. The coachman slashed at me with his whip; the three coaches, their upholstery of scarlet and gold glimpsed for an instant by the light of the coach lamps, drove on.

Only one face peered out. Quaintly set off though it was at this hour by tasselled nightcap and embroidered gown, I knew it well. Less handsome by far than he had appeared at Exeter Assizes two years back, more swollen by brandy and disease than he had been, George Jefferies, Lord Chief Justice of England, passed.

I could guess his errand. Had he not sworn to hang more men when he came to the West than had been hanged since William the Norman's time, six hundred and more years ago? Where promises of this sort were concerned Judge Jefferies and his master King James could be relied upon to keep their word.

I had moved so far from safety that night I did not shiver at the thought. They might do their worst, my mind went, and then, why then we would do ours.

Beaten though I was and very near the ground, I raised myself from off my knees and looked after them.

PART TWO

THE LAST FORTNIGHT IN SEPTEMBER

THE LAST FORTNIGHT IN SEPTEMBER

"AFTER all that has happened in these last few weeks only a fool," Gramercy declared, "would hope for mercy. There's no mercy to be had."

My thoughts too full for any kind of speech, I rode on and did not answer her.

Before me Taunton's Church of St. Mary Magdalene stood up nobly as ever against the sky, the Tone flowed smoothly, the path along its banks that Oliver and I had trodden appeared greener now between the late September flowers. I closed my eyes to shut it from my sight and saw it still.

All that I was remembering belonged, I knew, to yesterday. And to-day was here.

On the twenty-seventh of August my Lord Chief Justice Jefferies had arrived at Winchester with four other Judges to open what King James was pleased to term 'Jefferies' campaign in the West.' From the beginning the campaign went well. No time was lost; no illegality spared. Wherever my Lord Chief Justice and his fellow judges went Master Jack Ketch the hangman and his assistants followed them.

At Winchester my Lady Alice Lisle was tried for harbouring John Hicks, a Baptist minister whom she knew, and a fugitive, though it is doubtful if she knew this, from the Battle of Weston Moor. She was so foolish from old age she slept throughout her trial and only woke to say most gently that she hoped she would not be condemned unheard.

Although many eminent persons (including my Lord Feversham, for the small consideration to my Lord of a thousand guineas), pleaded for her, King James could only with difficulty be persuaded to reduce her sentence from burning to beheading. She had died most bravely from the executioner's axe upon the second of September in Winchester Market Place.

On the twelfth of September Christopher Battiscombe and eleven others whom I knew well had died by hanging, drawing

and quartering at Lyme upon the Cob. Sampson Larke, our old Baptist minister, was among them, together with Joseph Tyler of Bristol, our good William Cox and William Hewling. The latter was no more than nineteen. Though Hannah Hewling, his sister, and Alderman William Kyffen of the City of London, his grandfather, pleaded for his life King James would not listen. The only concession he would make in return for the sum, again, of a thousand guineas, was that William should be hanged indeed, but not disembowelled or quartered, and that his body should be delivered whole to his family for Christian burial.

I was not there upon the Cob to see them die. But on the day following their deaths I paid my tribute to them. Together with a crowd of people, some two hundred strong, I attended William's burying in Lyme churchyard. We attended at great risk to ourselves. Yet no-one mocked our grief or hindered us in what we did: we were not reported upon nor punished; Mayor Alford and his fellow Councillors who had been obliged to witness the executions appeared ashamed; the soldiery everywhere as we passed seemed filled with pity.

From Winchester my Lord Chief Justice had moved on to Dorchester. Here over three hundred prisoners from the Battle of Weston Moor awaited him.

Once more no hearing was given them, no defence allowed. Once more there was no appeal. Upon the Saturday thirty men were condemned to die; on the Monday following Master Ketch and his assistants despatched them all. Two hundred of those that remained were promised a pardon if they would plead guilty. They did so, poor simple creatures, and were at once condemned.

At Exeter similar scenes were played out, the same mockery of justice done. And now it was Taunton's turn.

Together with five hundred and twenty-six more prisoners taken at the Battle, Oliver lay in Taunton Castle Gaol. To-morrow, September the eighteenth, Judge Jefferies would open his Assize in the County of Somerset and begin his trial of them for High Treason.

Gramercy broke in once more upon my thoughts. "If you were only one half as rich as my Lord Grey you might buy a pardon from the King for Master Bland. But you've got nothing.

You have only got the squatty little bit of gold the Master left you. And *that's* nothing."

Spitefulness would prick me to an answer if I were three parts dead, and so this time I answered her. "And all this pleases you," I said. "So now, Gramercy, could you not be silent?"

We rode on without speaking after that past shuttered houses, down deserted streets. A few soldiers came out to stare at us, a dog trotted companionably at our horses' heels. Taunton appeared dead or half asleep, or deep in mourning.

Outside what had been the Blake's *Academy for Young Ladies* we halted. It was as desolate as I had feared. Every window fronting the street was broken; one casement swung wide; the vine that had filled the schoolroom with its tracery of moving branches lay like a crumpled banner of green upon the ground.

While I gazed at it and mourned at what I saw, someone spoke my name. I turned my head. A little man in a brownish-coloured suit was hurrying smilingly across the road towards me. I looked at his pock-marked face, at the wart set like a stud upon his right ear and looked away. He was a noted talker, I remembered, and kept a barber's shop not far off.

Without preamble he began: "Do you seek Mistress Mary Blake, ladies? She is lodged in Dorchester gaol awaiting her trial for High Treason. She is ill of the fever, they say, or else of the small pox. And will die of it, whichever it is — she may be dead already for all I know. If so it would be merciful for her, it would be a blessed release.

"Her pupils, young children though many of them be, will be transported to the sugar plantations as slaves, it is certain, unless their relatives pay out vast sums of money for them. King James has given twenty of them to Queen Mary of Modena for her pin-money. She will give them to her ladies in waiting, it is said, though Nimmo, her Italian hairdresser, will have his share of them also."

Drawing nearer, he lowered his voice. "I know you well by sight, mistress, therefore I am not afraid to speak. I think it very ill of a Queen of England, Spaniard and Papist though she be, to traffic so for money in English children's lives.

"But I must not stay talking," he continued, "for I have my Lord Chief Justice Jefferies' wig to dress for to-morrow. He has the best room in *The George* with Master Ketch, the hangman, resting very convenient and near.

"Ah," he rattled on, "poor Master Ketch is quite worn out, I'm told, by the vast quantities of work he has to do. What a botch he made of the Duke of Monmouth's head, to be sure! Five butcherly strokes to despatch a head! In Taunton he'll have Master Pascha Rose and Tom Boilman to assist him. Master Rose's trade is butchering, mistress, as you know. He will make no trouble at all of the disembowelling and the quartering . . . And Tom Boilman — so folk have christened him already — I know not his real name — will finish the affair.

"But, ladies," — here he spread out both hands — "ladies, what an expense all this is to the town! Half a bushel of salt is needed, they tell me, to boil the four quarters of a man. And after that I know not how much Stockholm tar . . ."

At this point I could bear no more. His words beat on my brain like flails, a blackness came before my eyes; I bent my head.

As though from a distance I heard the barber's voice again: "You have turned fainty-like, mistress. I would not have spoken if I had known . . ." And Gramercy's voice, "What a tongue you've got, fellow. Be off with you — dinning on and on like a shower of rain."

I felt Gramercy lift me from my horse and marvelled for a moment that she should be so strong. And then I could only struggle with myself and the different sensations that came over me — the sweating first, followed by cold and shivering and all the while a darkness before my eyes.

When at last I struggled to my feet I was thrust back again upon the heap of crumpled vine branches that had served me in these last few seconds for a bed.

"So that's it," Gramercy declared, standing over me. "If I did not think so — you are with child."

My pulse leapt for a moment, then quietened. "If it is so then I am glad," I said. I spoke composedly.

"What a commotion you have caused to be sure," Gramercy

said, her head turned away. "Somebody else coming to us now, I do declare," she announced, panicking. "Bless the folk, I say. Bless them for a pack of busybodies."

A little woman in a long white apron was hurrying across the road towards us. I recognised her also.

"It is Mistress Gideon," I said. "Mary Blake and I always bought our soft fruit from her."

Mistress Gideon bent over me. Under her white cap her face was strained and tired.

"You are here on Master Bland's account, Mistress Hawkesley," she said. "Do not tell me differently, for I know. He is in Taunton Gaol with my son Tom. You remember Tom?"

"Of course," I said.

"How he picked my pinks for you," she said, "and laid them a-top of the raspberries and I scolded him?" Her mouth trembling, she straightened. "You are sick — I can see that. Would you not rest with me? There is only to-morrow."

I went with her most thankfully. Gramercy, clicking her tongue between her teeth in disapproval, followed, drawing our two horses after her.

There are merciful gaps in memory no effort at remembering can fill. It is the little things that stay in the mind until the end; the rest, mercifully again, move as it were further away.

I remember waiting with Mistress Gideon and many hundreds more Taunton folk outside Taunton castle courtyard. The pomp and pageantry of my Lord Chief Justice's arrival did not move me — the fanfare of trumpets and the salute of arms, the array of soldiery and the scarlet robes. And yet I am certain they carried their message to my brain of my own helplessness in the face of so much power.

The Court room was hung with scarlet, I was told, in obedience to my Lord Chief Justice's express command. From the ranks of soldiery that hemmed us in I had no sight of it yet nor any glimpse of Oliver, though my eyes longed for him. I remember the bustle of that first hour and the clear colours

everywhere. They were so bright they seemed to hurt my eyes, red and sore as they were from so much weeping.

I can recall the many different sounds: the thud of closing doors, unseen; the lift and fall of the prisoners' chains upon the ground and the pitiful shuffling of the prisoners' feet. I remember the unclouded sky above us and the white-hot sun, and the silence that presently succeeded the bustle and the sound.

The doors of the Court room were flung open and the crowd surged forward, carrying Mistress Gideon and myself with them. We could hear voices within the Court room now — the clerk's voice buzzing on like a tired wasp on a window pane, and Judge Jefferies' voice raised in anger or abuse, that savage voice meant to strike terror in every soul around.

The trials, mere mockeries of justice though they were, went on. The prisoners, chained together in batches of twenty or more, were thrust into the Court room, abused and bullied and condemned unheard, and thrust out again to the same clank of chains, the same shuffle of feet.

The hours dragged on towards noon. The soldiers about the doors of the Court room yawned. One ate an apple, looking down at it as though affectionately all the while. Another appeared to doze upon his feet, then woke and blinked and gave an upward flick to his nose — it was hooked and turned a little to his left — and dozed again.

We continued to wait. A little wind ruffled the leaves; what clouds there were moved on like small ships towards the West. Just after twelve noon a fresh stir could be felt, fresh sounds were heard; the soldiers stiffened again, the militiaman who had dozed so often sneezed and started wide awake and my Lord Chief Justice, attended by the same pomp that had awaited upon him at his coming in, appeared.

He had despatched his business well. Close on two hundred prisoners, Oliver and Tom Gideon among them, or so we understood, had been tried so far and all but two, whose names we did not know, condemned.

And so the Court adjourned.

I was in Taunton's Cornhill long before it was time for the last tryst that Oliver and I would keep.

The day (September the thirtieth), fixed for the execution of the first batch of prisoners condemned to die in Taunton dawned still and warm. It was a day like many another I had loved and known, filled with the sun's gold and the mellow time of the year and the harvest's ending. I watched the light spread from the eastern sky to the town's outer rim and the clouds melt in seas of tranquil fire. The distant trees bent to an invisible wind; the birds took off on their first morning flight and the thin yellow leaves from the apple trees in the gardens fell in showers. And I knew that the end of all our hopes and all our love lay here.

I looked about me: grief and something of the same thought appeared to be written upon every face. Dry-eyed, I looked away.

Everything about us was arranged in readiness for the work that must soon begin. A great fire kindled to burn the entrails of the dead burned within the wide circle the soldiery had made with a fierce heart of flame; the hempen ropes on the row of newly erected gallows facing us swung easily, as they should; each gallows had its short flight of steps firmly in place. The executioner's knives and saws were ranged neatly side by side on Pascha Rose's clean-scrubbed butcher's bench, facing the gallows. The bags of Cheshire salt, the rusty vats filled with water from the Tone and the barrels of Stockholm tar for the boiling and subsequent tarring of the dismembered quarters of the dead were conveniently in place.

Master Jack Ketch, the executioner, clad in black, stood negligently to one side near the gallows; his assistants, Pascha Rose, the butcher, and Tom Boilman, had their places behind him. Conspicuous among the dignitaries on the small raised platform near the innermost circle of the soldiery, and somewhat to the right of them, the High Sheriff of the County waited, head bent, gold timepiece cupped in one large hand.

It was all as orderly as a small town Market Fair before the church clock strikes the hour and the town crier, whose business it is to announce that the Fair is open, rings his bell.

And opening time was near. The hangman's carts crowded with the condemned men whipped forward noisily over the

cobblestones. At the sound, so familiar and yet so filled with horror at this time, my heart died a little within me, I think; the crowd moved restlessly about me and then drew closer together until it seemed tight-packed and small, and now everything grew still.

I looked for Oliver once more and found him. It was plain he had little thought for me and none for this world; in mind and spirit at least he had moved on where I could not follow him. And suddenly I was glad with all my heart for his sake that the imprisonment was past for him and the hope deferred and the long waiting.

I could not write of what followed if there had been no triumph of the spirit to set beside so much pain.

All England knows how William Hewling, who was to die among the first six beside Oliver, asked if they might sing a Psalm before execution was done, and how permission was granted them.

The hangman's noose about their necks, they sang the Twenty-third Psalm through to the end.

Though the crowd and some of the soldiers sang with them my own lips did no more than frame the words: "The Lord is my shephard; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul . . . Yea, though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil . . ."

At the end of the singing, everything that had been ordered so tidily followed until King James's work was done.

But first the High Sheriff lifted a hand, Master Ketch stepped forward, Master Rose slipped deftly for so stout a man behind his butcher's bench.

From that moment, for as long as I could see him, my eyes did not leave Oliver's face. I did not cry out at all the fearsome things I saw; I had no wish to pray; I could not weep. Instead I put out all the strength I had to comfort him, and all the love. "Peace," my mind and soul cried to his, "peace, my heart's dear. After pain comes peace."

But when the executioner tore out his living heart and cast it in the fire I fell upon my knees, and saw and felt no more.

**And in that time my old self died, I think, and went with him;
another self unknown to me was born.**

PART THREE
THE LONG WINTER

THE LONG WINTER

THE story I have to tell of the weeks that followed is one of endurance only, of existence gnawing and painful and very near the bone.

For weeks after Oliver's death I remained sunk in spirit and almost dead of heart. I scarcely knew how time went nor what I did; I only know that I was busy and active always, for there was much to do and very little time except in the quiet watches of the night for thought.

During the first weeks in October my aunt and Dinah and I moved from my uncle's house in Lyme to Starvecrow and Mayor Gregory Alford, as we had expected, moved in. As King's Commissioner he took command of my uncle's goods and the house and of all those possessions that remained to my aunt which Gramercy and Jasper had not succeeded in carrying away.

It is certain that he knew of Gramercy's visits, secret though she believed them to be, certain also that he was informed almost from the beginning of our plans. It was within his power to seize Starvecrow in the King's name and clap Gramercy and my aunt and myself in gaol. He did none of these things. It is possible he may have felt some compassion for us. It is more likely that he held his hand for fear that times might change.

Indeed, though we did not know it yet, they were changing fast.

Ours was not the only cart laden with sorrowful folk to move out that October morning from Lyme. Many other families left with us, travelled the same westward road for a while, then were lost again. I wish I might write that the sun shone, that the autumn colours glowed through the morning mists. But all was neutral and grey. The sun was no more than a streak of yellow in the sky, the grey thunder clouds had put all the fires of autumn out.

I know that my own mind was full of myself and the child that must soon be born; I remember that my aunt wept seasonably three parts of the way, that silent flights of yellow-hammers,

travelling as we were towards the west, skimmed the tops of the hedges as we passed.

The road climbed higher; the down opened before us; Lyme and all that we had known fell away. The wheels of our cart bowled smoothly over the short turf; there was no sound, no movement other than our own and the slow lovely drift about us of the seeds of the downland flowers.

In sight of the farm my aunt lifted her head most gallantly and dried her eyes. So we drove into Starvecrow, Dimity a little pillar of silence beside me while I held the reins.

* * *

For a fortnight Gramercy and I, Jasper having left the day before my aunt and I arrived, played Adam and Eve in this new wilderness of ours, so populous with slugs and snails, so jungle-thick with weeds. And then once more it rained; the slugs and snails came out in companies again and Gramercy, without supplying any good reason for doing so, laid down her hoe and swore that she must go to Lyme.

She returned about dusk, shaking the raindrops from her cloak as she came in, and full of news.

"Master John is safe," she announced while she hung up her cloak. "Mistress Julian had the news from a Dutchman, a traveller in woollen goods, who showed her Captain Julian's letter and his seal. So it's true."

Hands to her wet hair, she came further into the room. "Master John is in Amsterdam, working and living with a Dutch shipbuilder there who knew the Master, one who knows Captain Julian too. So he is safe, and among friends, and rid of the warehouse as he always wanted to be."

Rid of his father also, I thought, and his friends.

Gramercy moved nearer the fire. "You don't seem too pleased. Do you blame Master John then for taking his chance of life when it was offered him?"

"Would you not blame him," I asked, "in my place?"

"I wouldn't blame him or not blame him," Gramercy said cautiously. "I am sure I don't know why anyone should do what

Master Bland did, and that's the truth." She studied one shoe that had been steaming before the fire, then hid it under her skirts. "Master Bland can't have treasured his life much, I reckon, or he would never have thrown it away. But there was always something fine, not to say finicky about him. He was never quite like the ordinary run of folk."

Never, I thought. Unchecked, without previous warning my tears flowed. I shook them back.

Gramercy scolded me. "It's past. It's over. You want to forget all that." She moved towards the door, then paused. "Other women have had their troubles too. Did you ever think of them?"

I confess," I said, "I did not think of you."

"That's what I meant," Gramercy paused again. "Would you like to hear the rest I have to tell?"

"Tell me," I sat down.

"You know about Mistress Blake," Gramercy went on, "about her being dead of the fever in Dorchester gaol. Well, that's true. No-one ought to shed a tear. Like Mistress Elizabeth Gaunt she would have been condemned to be burned for certain if she had come to her trial."

I spoke with difficulty. "I have not heard of Mistress Elizabeth Gaunt."

"You haven't?" Gramercy was incredulous. "You do surprise me. She is to be burned at Wapping any time now for sheltering a fugitive for just the one night from Weston Moor. It was her husband, they say, Captain Gaunt of Wapping, who helped my Lord Shaftesbury to get away to Holland in the last King's time. So there will be no mercy for her. And none for Mistress Blake's schoolchildren either, poor silly little things, unless their parents pay a vast deal of ransom money for them. But you knew that."

"Yes," I said.

"Well, I'll go and tell the Mistress what I have told you," Gramercy said, "and cheer *her* up."

I waited, emptied of feeling after she had gone and almost empty of thought. The fire burned low; the cold of Starvecrow crept in once more.

Stepping lightly, Gramercy returned. "Can't you find anything to *do*?" she said, and left again.

My aunt, as I had feared, followed her, bearing down on me most gallantly. "Deborah, Gramercy tells me you grudge my son his safety."

"Only the price of it," I said.

"I grudge that too," my aunt said. "Oh, Deborah, I grudge all their lives. Are they not wasted?"

"No," I said.

"I will not argue with you." She reproached me now. "You have not once spoken to me of your child."

"I cannot think of it," I said, "or feel for it as I should."

She took my hands in hers, comforting me when for a moment I wept again. "Only have faith," she said.

In what? I thought. And yet, so magical were the words, my mind, like hers, rested for a little while upon certainties. Against my will I felt myself warmed and even comforted. Starvecrow, itself, when I woke next morning appeared less bleak, the white October mists rolling in upon us like another sea less cold.

* * *

The days followed one another as monotonously as drops of water falling upon a stone. More news of affairs outside reached us.

A travelling packman whose name we never learned stayed to talk over a dish of eggs we could not rightly spare; Job Truman, the carrier from Lyme, found us out.

King James's vengeance, it appeared, had moved on to London from the West, leaving a fearful trail of tarred and blackened human heads and trunks and limbs behind. They could be seen in every town and village where the Duke had been, displayed on every vantage point and standing post, on every pinnacle and every tower. The trees on village greens and at the cross roads throughout the West were thick with them: the stench they gave out and the flocks of crows that fed on them told where they were.

Since there were four quarters to a man even without his head the sheriffs of the western counties had hard work to display all those human parts that were assigned to them. No town or

village might refuse its share of those portions of the dead that were parcelled out to them; it was a felony meriting another death to cut a head or a quarter down. If any fell, as often happened, it was the duty of the local constables to hoist them up again.

In London Mistress Elizabeth Gaunt was indeed burned alive at Wapping while my Lord Chief Justice Jefferies was rewarded by King James for his many services with a barony and a blood-stone ring.

By contrast with this cruel time the weather had never shown itself more fair. September for the most part had been grey with rain; October stayed ripe and golden until the end. Never before had I seen such colours of apricot and flame in the western skies, colours reflected like fallen petals in the quiet seas. Starvecrow had been a green jungle filled with slugs and creeping things and snails. But now, for a little while, it was brimful of flowers. Flotillas of butterflies — Meadow Browns, Fritillaries. and Peacock Eyes — were always to be seen moving unsteadily, their wings furled, over the purple scabious and the nettles and the wild sage; apples fell to the ground with the soft thud I loved to hear; dewberries seen through the mists were like blackamoor's eyes.

* * *

So much beauty could not last. In November the cold came. At Starvecrow it was an enemy we had cause to fear, unprepared for it as we were in that uncivil place. I know I paused for a second when it fell upon us first and looked about me in something like alarm, then bent hastily to my work again — the packing against the frost of our well-head with hoddens aprons stuffed with straw.

That same week, as a result of having busied myself with tasks that were too heavy for me, I miscarried of Oliver's child. The loss once more was only mine. I grieved more than I had thought it possible to grieve, but no-one grieved with me. Though my aunt was kind I could read only satisfaction on Gramercy's face. She had lost her child, she seemed to say, when she also was unmarried. Why should I not, she seemed to ask, lose mine?

So we were equals, I thought, in sorrow and disgrace.

We were equals in toil also. As one black frost followed another through the dark days and the long nights she and I, for I was soon recovered again, laboured unceasingly out of doors through all the daylight hours to prepare for the snow which we knew must fall. We mended (as well as we could), fences and gates; we stopped up holes in roofs and cracks in doors and walls. Our work was never done; there were always our two horses and the poultry to be fed, water to be drawn from the well and carried indoors, wood chopped and sawn. From so much labour out of doors, much of it beyond our strength and all our ordinary skills, we were worn down in body and spirit; all was toil and moil and the hard bite of the cold.

When the snow came we were as though besieged. I had always loved the snow, the slow lovely fall of the flakes, grey-white against blue-grey skies and the silence that appeared to come down with them, spreading and soft and deep. I found I loved it still, and yet it doubled all our tasks, it added to every burden that we bore.

Even Gramercy complained. "It's the going-on and the going-on I can't endure."

The yoke about her shoulders — we had been drawing water from the well — she looked at me.

In fairness I felt obliged to speak. "You at least, Gramercy," I said, "need not stay."

She tossed her head, wrapped around in warm red flannel as it was, and the water in the two pails she was carrying slopped icily about her feet. And then, Gramercy-fashion, she turned on me. "I am not one to run away. And pray, where should we go?"

Where indeed? I thought. While the snow lasted no-one, it seemed to me, could go out from Starvecrow or come in. I was doubly mistaken here.

* * *

At the height of the cold, when our stock of food was dwindling fast and our store of guineas not far from spent, an unexpected mercy fell on us like Israelitish manna from the skies.

One morning, before Gramercy was out of bed or my aunt had

stirred, I was vexed to discover that the latch on our outer door at Starvecrow would not lift. Lantern in hand, for it was still dark, I went round to the front of the house by the other door. Once there I distrusted the evidence of my own eyes. I shone the lantern nearer. Through its bull's eye of glass I saw that a hare and a brace of pheasants, tied together with a plaited cord of grass, weighed down the latch.

Thankful and marvelling, I took them in.

Providence had sent them, my aunt declared. Gramercy turned them over critically with one foot. "Whoever brought these," she declared, "Providence or no, was a mighty good hand with a catapult and a snare." Dinah was interested only in the main thing. Roasted pheasant was her very favourite dinner, she declared.

We had received our first gift of game at Starvecrow, but not our last. Every week, sometimes twice within the week, similar offerings were made. They were left after dark; they were not always to be found in the same place. We were as far as ever from discovering their source. The tracks our visitor left in the snow were our only guide: they followed our own, then led in the direction of Starvecrow wood. We would have followed them if the snow drifts had not remained so dangerous and so deep.

But one day a hard sparkling surface to the snow tempted us abroad. Starvecrow wood — it was of fir trees — showed black and emerald against the sky. I looked and looked again, and presently the desire I had to visit the place gained invincibly on me.

Gramercy who opposed everything I wished to do on principle, opposed this plan of mine also. "You'll find nothing that is any good to you there," she insisted. "Best keep away."

I had intended to go alone but at the last moment Dinah and the sledge she and I took with us wherever we went came with me. It was large enough to hold us both. We could haul it up the steep slopes, I told myself, and course down.

Our plan worked well at first. We arrived triumphantly on the crest of the ridge. Below us Starvecrow wood lay. It was not large. A few rooks could be seen wheeling majestically on the other side, their wings stark black against the sky.

At the sight of them I hesitated, for what reason I do not know. And then, throwing hesitation like a pinch of salt over my shoulder, I coursed down. A road, visible only as a depression in the snow branched off upon our right, then appeared to skirt the wood on the other side. Immediately in front of us, torn-off boughs of spruce and fir thrust up temptingly out of the snow.

We collected what we could of them for our fires then followed the line of the road to the other side. Once there I paused in horror and dismay. The trees fronting the downland road were weighted with human quarters and with crows. At our approach the sky grew dark with wings, the air in this quiet place was filled with the birds' harsh cries. Dislodged no doubt by so great a stir one frozen quarter after another fell and lay half-hidden in the snow. At once the crows were on them, rocking on ungainly feet, their wings half-spread. From horror once more, and a kind of shame that these things should be, I caught at Dinah's hand and fled, our sledge bumping behind us and shedding half its burden as we ran. Only once did we pause to look back.

A man, as shapeless as if he were stuffed with straw, stood motionless at the woodside as we ran past. He held what might have been a trap for game dangling from one hand. Only afterwards when we were within doors did I begin to tell myself that the man whom we had caught sight of at the edge of the wood and the stranger who had brought gifts of game to our door must be the same. How could it be otherwise? And yet I could not help but wonder why any stranger should take so much thought for us.

Gramercy enlightened me. "It's that deserter, I'll be bound," she declared shrewdly. "The one Captain Julian was so mad about that brought you news from Frome."

We were not left long in doubt. Some days later I was awakened by loud cacklings in our hen-house. With all the haste I could I made my way outside. As I had half expected the man I had glimpsed at the woodside stood outlined there. He had his back to me, his hands busy and fumbling about the latch.

He whipped round when I drew near, then stood stock still, his eyes on me. There was such a power of wildness about him it took me unawares; my pulse leapt for a second in something like

fear; in the same moment my mind worked quickly as though in a cleared space.

I spoke to him. "Are you the deserter who brought us news from Frome?"

"To my certain knowledge I have never set eyes on you, lady," he said.

He spoke, I thought, as if his tongue were stiff.

"It does not matter," I said. I went on quickly, "Will you not freeze in Starvecrow wood?"

He stared at me.

"I ask," I said, "because there is room for you in the barn if you wish. But you must do as you please."

My heart beating uncomfortably fast, I moved on. As I did so I felt his eyes following me.

For a little while he came and went as before, unseen and almost unheard. Gradually he stayed with us longer, he moved about more openly. By stages he took upon himself certain tasks: he fetched and carried water, he brought in wood, he swept our stables and paths. Like a child he would praise himself. "I have as strong a pair of arms as any man in Dorset," he would say. When he swept our yard he would boast proudly, "Anyone could eat off this floor."

I never got to know him as I knew Jasper. He never betrayed himself as Jasper did; I could never be angry with him or laugh at him; it was never possible to come near. And yet on one occasion at least I felt I saw into his mind, I shared his thought.

He had been absent from the farm for the whole of one day. Towards dusk he returned. It was shortly before Christmas. The snow had been gone for some days and Starvecrow was ankle-deep in slush and mire.

Mattock on shoulder he greeted me at Starvecrow's door. "Lady, I have done a good deed."

At once I guessed what good deed he had done. The stench of the grave was about him and the smell of new-turned earth. I drew back a pace.

"They were men I've marched beside," he said, "as like as not. And talked with too."

As sick as when Dinah and I went first to Starvecrow

wood I turned my head away.

He came nearer. "You'll never be affrighted by the sight of them again, mistress," he said. "Nor weep for them. They are Christian dust."

He would liked to have go on talking of his good deed, I think, but I left him. He allowed me to go, and that was like him, I thought. As I write, I can see him plain. Gentleness and wildness were about equal in him. He was courteous and simple; he appeared to have no cares, and yet I think he must often have been afraid.

Just before Christmas a column of King's men, drums beating, fifes playing, came to Starvecrow in a final search for fugitives from Weston Moor. At sight of their red coats showing over the ridge of the down the Deserter fled. I have never seen a man run as he did, slipping from wall to wall, shadow to shadow. So an old fox might go, I thought, when the hounds first give tongue and the hunt is after him.

Though the King's men searched every corner of the house at Starvecrow and every hiding-place outside the house walls they found nothing. They beat Starvecrow wood as if they were beating coverts for game and returned, on their own confession, empty handed. Having eaten all that we had to put before them and drunk half a barrel of ale, and called for more, and been courteously denied, they went again very civilly.

The down returned to itself, the columns of smoke from the fires the soldiers had kindled within the wood grew wispy and thin and died away, and still the Deserter did not return. After two days had passed I set out, full of dread, to look for him. There was evidence in plenty that the soldiers had visited the wood. The undergrowth was trampled and torn; trees had been uprooted and half burned; ivy torn down. No more than a heap of ashes, cold by this time, remained of the Deserter's hut. Of the Deserter himself I could find no trace.

It grew dark between the fir trees; it grew silent also except for the chattering of two magpies overhead and the scarcely audible beat of an owl's wings down the glade.

Like the Deserter himself I turned and ran. A tall dead tree pointed the way. I remembered it well. Stripped of leaves and

bark, it shone smooth and yellow as bone in the gloom. I made towards it. The larches stood closely about me as I ran, the larch needles slithered and slipped under my feet. A foot or so from the tree a small boulder appeared to have been overturned. I went round it, then paused. Hunched and small, the Deserter himself hung between me and the darkening sky from the skeleton tree.

"He was always a poor tool," Gramercy said when I returned. She had paused for a second. "Well, he's finished now."

Poor soul, I thought. He had lived too long with fear and fear had overcome him in the end. So I pitied him. I grieved for him also. He had helped to keep us alive in our hardest times; he had been courteous always — rudeness from whatever source was something I never could bear — he had been kind. I could not forget his 'good deed'. When I remembered it I felt queerly comforted.

I might have grieved for him longer if affairs outside Starvecrow had not taken on a new turn, if signs of change had not been observable almost everywhere.

Gramercy was the first to report upon them. A few days before Christmas she had journeyed a second time to Lyme, taking Dinah with her, in order to buy provisions of the most necessary kind.

She brought back a good store of all that we needed and of news. Friends and acquaintances who had stood far off in our more troubled times had crossed the road to speak to her. Mayor Alford himself, whom we had always thought of as an enemy, had turned in his saddle and given her good-day.

* * *

She had met Jasper, she continued gleefully, and had talked with him for an hour while Clarice waited vainly in the market square. She had encountered the Lieutenant also, spindly-legged as ever, she declared, and fresh as paint, twirling a silver-knobbed cane upon the Cob.

At mention of the Lieutenant Dinah, who was sitting beside me upon the settle before our fire of logs, wriggled nervously. I tightened my arm about her. Whom else had Gramercy seen? I asked.

"I've left the best to the end," Gramercy said, her eyes on me. "You won't be pleased, for you two never did get on." She paused. I did not speak. "Captain Julian," she said, "is coming home on the strength of the King's General Pardon. Mistress Julian came scampering all the way down Chapel Lane to tell me. Coming home for good," Gramercy continued, "and before long too. So he'll be here at Starvecrow any time now. Him with his little round belly and his great nose."

Dinah thrust her head out from under my arm like a duck out of a basket.

"I *love* big noses." She withdrew again.

"Bless the child! So does the Mistress," Gramercy said.

I cut her short. On some pretext I sent Dinah away.

"You need not be in such a hurry to cut *me* short," Gramercy declared sulkily when the child's back was turned. "The Captain had an eye for the Mistress from the very first. But she would never look at him."

"Why should she do so now?" I asked.

Gramercy bridled. "Why ever not? Times have changed, haven't they?"

Had she heard nothing else? I wished to know.

She tossed her head. "Only that the Lady Henrietta Wentworth, the Duke of Monmouth's love whom he called his wife, though she was never that, is home again at her great house in Stepney. She is ill of a consumption, they say, helped on by a broken heart, and like to die."

"Ah, poor lady," I cried.

"Why, what do you know of her?" Gramercy paused curiously.

"Enough," I said.

For a second or two all that I had heard of the Lady Henrietta even before that day when the three of us, John and Oliver and I, spoke of her first came flooding back into my mind. The love between the Duke and herself, I remembered, had been more than an attraction of opposites. It had been a transforming passion that had changed their own and all our lives.

Their meeting, as stage partners in a Court masque, had seemed to set a pattern for all that followed. From that moment

they had been actors always, chief players for a short time on a stage wider than England, as wide as Europe itself.

When they met the Lady Henrietta had been heiress to great wealth and a great name; he had been soldier and General, King Charles the Second's eldest and favourite illegitimate son and the Court's darling, husband moreover of that other great heiress, whose name he had taken for his own. Ann Scott, Countess of Buccleugh.

From his early days he had wished passionately to be something in himself, not merely a Court favourite and the King's darling. But the role of Protestant leader he had chosen which the Lady Henrietta, always a dreamer and a visionary, had desired for him also had proved, it seemed now, too great a part for him to play.

He had failed. So, I thought, in times past had many other honourable men. And the play was not over yet, only the first Act was done.

"Whatever are you thinking of?" Gramercy demanded.

"Nothing," I said. "Nothing at all."

I left Gramercy; I went in search of Dinah. I had much to trouble me, much to occupy my mind, and all of it must wait.

* * *

Half an hour later Dinah and I went about our usual task of egg-collecting. We went hopefully about this as about so much else — what more in such bitter weather could we do?

"I wish it was summer," Dinah said, "so that we might go blackberrying. It was nice then."

"Before the soldiers came," I said.

She nodded, walking beside me, a small basket for eggs in one hand, her head bent.

Turning her toes in and looking down at them, she announced after a moment, "I saw the Lieutenant in Lyme."

"Gramercy saw him also," I said.

"He spoke to me," Dinah said, "when Jasper was hugging Gramercy behind a wall." She looked up. "Is that what walls are for?"

"No," I said. I asked, "What did the Lieutenant say?"

"He kissed me twice." Dinah turned her toes in importantly. "One kiss I might take for myself, he said, t'other I might give to you." She halted, face upturned. "Will you have it now?"

"From you, yes," I said. I stooped to her.

"Why did you not tell me of the Lieutenant before?" I asked presently.

"Because," she said, wriggling, "because Gramercy . . ."

"Because Gramercy did not wish you to tell me of Jasper?" I suggested.

"Yes." Dinah nodded again. "Does it matter?"

"Not now," I said.

She had relinquished my hand. She took hold of it again. "Is summer long?" she wished to know.

"It seems so sometimes," I said. "Why?"

"Gramercy bet Jasper two pennies that come summer you would be gone. Will you?" Dinah stood still. "Do not go. I do not want you ever to go from me. You will not go yet?"

"Not yet," I said. I stooped and kissed her. Even as I did so I was aware of my own restlessness, my own stirrings of discontent.

* * *

That night, in the quiet of Starvecrow, my aunt and Gramercy having long since retired to bed, my thoughts crowded in on me. The possible consequences to myself of Captain Julian's return overtopped them all. If my aunt and he married, as I began to think they might, there would be no place for me in any house they might share. While Dinah would have the protection of a stepfather and my aunt would enjoy again all the safety and the cherishing she desired I should neither be wanted nor needed. I could not continue at Starvecrow. A life so hard and so bereft of companionship was not to be endured for a moment, it seemed to me, after the need for it was past.

Where then should I go? What could I do? Who would receive me? These and other questions of the same sort beat insistently on my poor brain. I could not answer them.

While I touched despair Gramercy's other news of the Lady

Henrietta's return to London came flooding back into my mind. Gradually a plan, vague and half-formed as yet, presented itself to me. I thrust it away. It was wild in the extreme, it was altogether impracticable. It returned in more solid shape. I remembered what Gramercy had told me of the Lady Henrietta. Could I not serve her? I thought now. Had not Oliver served the Duke as a member of his Bodyguard? And suffered an even more fearful death for the same Cause? Was it altogether foolish on my part to hope that the Lady Henrietta might find some use for me in her illness and disgrace? Many of her servants, I persuaded myself, would have left her by this time; many of her friends, I judged, after the way of the world, would continue to hold aloof.

Once more I considered the matter only to reject it again. I should need a friend who would vouch for me, someone influential enough to plead my case. I had no-one. I did my best to look for comfort elsewhere. Captain Julian might not in fact return; if he did so my aunt might reject him. As one result of so much earnest thought on my part I began, no-one pitying me, to pity myself. I prayed that I might know what was in store for me soon, that I might not have long to wait.

This prayer of mine at least was answered.

A few days before Christmas Captain Julian knocked loudly on our house door. He listened and paused for a moment, then, having received no answer, he went in. I had observed him for a moment from the other side of our small stable-yard; now, taking off my apron of sacking as I did so, I followed him.

He had not changed — why should he have done so after all? The great jutting nose, the large leather-coloured face were just as I remembered them.

My aunt appeared all of a flutter to receive him. Her mouth trembled a little; her hands could not rest in her lap while he sat and talked.

He spoke almost at once of John. The lad was well, he said, and had just engaged himself to take his Dutch ship-builder's daughter for a wife.

My aunt exclaimed at this. "That I should hear of my son's betrothal only now," she mourned, "and, it is likely, never

meet his wife."

Captain Julian was at pains to reassure her. "But you will be meeting her, ma'am, when the King's General Pardon, which is promised for the New Year, is proclaimed. And when you do meet her you will find her a very proper worshipful young creature indeed, one that will make a good wife and a good dutiful daughter-in-law also."

He went on to sing the girl's praises even more loudly. Mistress Emmie had, it appeared, no airs and graces. She was sober and industrious, one (here he looked at me), who would never gad from home, nor trouble her head over matters she could not rightly understand. Her person, it was true, was somewhat short and round. But shape was nothing, to be sure, beside a warm heart. From the look of her he was convinced she would bring John a brood of fine children in next to no time.

"Not too many, too soon, let us hope. Ah! the poor soul!" my aunt cried.

I had been silent for some time, picturing to myself this paragon of the Netherlands when my aunt turned to me. Was I not glad of the marriage, for John's sake?

Truly, I said, I was glad to think that he should be settled so soon and so comfortably. I only hoped, I went on, that his wife would not spoil him with too much worship as I feared she might, or admire him so openly as to make him vain.

Captain Julian replied at once, feelingly. "Pray, Mistress Deborah, what better person is there to spoil a man than his wife?" He turned from me. "I would make so bold, ma'am," — here once more he addressed my aunt — "I would make so bold as to declare that every man that is a man stands in great need of being spoiled. I would even go so far as to say that he needs something of vanity also. For what is vanity in a man but a good opinion of himself? And that is something only too readily taken away from him by a multitude of fault-finding folk. Depend upon it, ma'am," said the Captain, crossing his legs and bringing everything to a conclusion, "if a man is to make his way happily in this world and not be trod upon, he will do all the better for being a trifle spoiled."

"That is true," my aunt said, nodding. "So it is, to be sure.

I had never considered of it before." Once more, almost appealingly, she turned to me. "I do consider, Deborah, I do indeed, that John may enjoy being worshipped a little."

"He may enjoy it too much," I said, rather tart. "That is what I had in mind."

Having fired the last shot in this three-cornered encounter, I excused myself and left hastily.

While the milder weather lasted scarcely a day passed Captain Julian's squat shadow did not darken our stone floor. He would arrive at noon, riding home before it was dark, rolling a little in his saddle as he did so like a small ship bound in pleasant trade wind weather for some home port. A day or two before Christmas he returned to Holland. And still nothing appeared to have been decided between my aunt and himself, and nothing was said.

I might have been more troubled than I was if the weather had not changed once more. As the days lengthened the cold returned. Once more the snow piled up against walls and doors; once more we were shut in upon ourselves, imprisoned between sea and down and sky. Again the cold struck deep; more sharply than before I felt that it could kill. Indifferent and pitiless, it appeared to match the world of men. Why should it not be so? I thought. Were we not part of earth? The seasons were in us, the warmth, the fickleness, the sudden thawings and the cold.

It was a cruel time we lived through then and yet I would not have escaped it if I could. The prolonged snow and frost brought a beauty all their own, of depths and silences, of plain black-and-white, of moulded lines and stark clear shapes, of azure shadows when the sun was high and sometimes, when it set, reflections of bright gold. The sudden thawings and renewed freezings brought in their train a wonder and a strangeness I had never known. Every berry, every leaf was cased in ice, the small trees that stood thickly about Starvecrow tinkled like castanets as we passed; the smooth half-frozen seas were filled with fire. It was a world brittle and rainbow-coloured like thin glass where living creatures went hungry or were starved.

I hugged the fire at nights and my own quiet when the day's work was done, sitting up long after my aunt and Gramercy were

in bed. The warmth within the room spoke of safety; the silence, broken only by the shifting of the logs or the soft fall of ash in our wide hearth, brought its own peace. In the world outside was the struggle I had come to know and fear, the stillness and the cold, the frosty glitter of the stars and an owl or two, as likely as not, hooting and crying.

While I sat by the fire one night, only the scamper of a few dried leaves outside to be heard and the creak, like stiff leather boots, of our one leather-covered chair a knock, sharply repeated, came at the house door.

I looked about me in alarm. The shutters on our one window were barred; the bolts on the door appeared strong enough to keep out any ordinary man.

I turned brave, therefore, and cried out boldly: "Who is there?" The Lieutenant's voice answered me.

On my feet I asked him, "Are you alone?"

"Damme, yes," he said, somewhat cross.

I let him in.

"Did you think," he asked, sliding a heavy canvas bag from his shoulders to the floor, "did you think I would come with an army at my back?"

"The army have been here," I said.

"I know." He took my hands and kissed them quickly.

I drew back from him. When I spoke I could hear the stiffness in my own voice. "I am obliged to you, sir, that you should have come so far to visit folk who have sunk so low."

"How low have you sunk, Mistress Deborah?" he asked, looking at me.

"Cannot you see?" I gestured.

"More than you suppose," he said, his eyes upon my face.

While I struggled with my feelings, for I was not yet used to pity, he spoke compassionately again. "You have not recovered yet, I think."

"From the death of Oliver Bland and the loss of his child and mine I think I never shall recover," I said.

I had been near tears before but now, overcome by my own words, I wept. But not for long.

He said, not looking at me, "Oh, do not weep."

"I weep," I said, "not only for what is past but because I cannot any longer feel as I did. And now I wish only to be gone."

"From Starvecrow?" He moved and spoke quickly. "Indeed I think you should. But we will speak of that. I must tell you first, Mistress Deborah, that I have resigned from the King's service. I am for the Prince of Orange, I will not say with all my heart as yet, but with all my head."

"Since when have you been so resolved, sir?" I asked.

"This long while." He smiled at me. "I have locked up my feelings on this and on one other matter too long."

On one other matter, I thought. I did not speak.

"All my duty as a soldier is to the Prince of Orange," he said. "But you, Mistress Deborah, do possess my heart."

"Stop, sir," I begged him, "I pray you."

"I cannot," he said. "Do you not see that I have only just begun?" He came nearer me. "I was about to add, Mistress Deborah, that if you have any particular need of a husband, would you not think of me?"

"I cannot," I said. "I thank you with all my heart. But it is impossible."

He looked hard at me and then he took his eyes away. "I see," he said, "that I also have jumped too soon. But to-morrow I am for London and after that for Holland. And I would leave you safe if I might. New and strange things may happen in this country again — I think they must — and you may once more be caught up in them."

New and strange things, I thought. Almost I hoped for them.

"But let us talk," he said.

Seated beside me upon the hard stool upon which Gramercy was wont to sit he spread his hands to the fire. "Are you not wanted at Starvecrow?"

I told him my fears. "Soon," I said, "I may not be wanted or needed here."

"If your aunt," he said, "should play Ruth to Captain Julian's Boaz, if they should marry, that is, would that not be a good thing?"

"For her, yes," I said.

"But not for you." He nodded. "What then would you do?"

I found enough courage to tell him of what was in my mind. "I would go to London if I might," I said. "But how to set about it I do not know. I wish I might find a place in some great household, or one not so great, where I might work and lodge for a while. I am strong," I said. "There is no household task I would not do." I paused.

"What great household have you in mind?" He looked at me.

"More than anything else," I said, "I wish I might serve the Lady Henrietta Wentworth. She is ill, they say, and has not long to live. Her friends and even her servants may have deserted her. Is it altogether foolish on my part to hope she might have some need of me?"

"Some of her servants have left her," he said, "and many of her friends, but by no means all."

"Then it is too wild a dream."

"Could we not make it," he asked, rubbing one long foot against another, "less wild? You would not be content, I think, simply to present yourself at the lady's house in Stepney and be refused. Would it not be better to provide yourself with a letter to the lady (which you will write yourself), in which you set out, quite simply, who you are and that you wish to serve her for a while, and why?" He turned to me. "Is there no-one who would vouch for you?"

"There is only Robert Marshall," I said, "whom the lady knows and trusts who would know of me. He was Sir Thomas Armstrong's man first, and afterwards His Grace of Monmouth's friend. But you will have heard of him." I stopped short, marvelling for a moment that I should have felt free to say so much and then I rushed on. "I do not know him well. I only know that he was one of those who dined with us at my uncle's house when the Duke's ships sailed in. I waited upon him as I did upon them all. He took note of me," I continued. "I am certain of it, I can remember even now how he scowled at me."

"He would do so," the Lieutenant said, "for I know him well, in the hope that you would keep your distance."

I spoke indignantly. "Why should he be afraid? I was never less than three feet from him."

"Three feet may halt the spread of the small pox," the

Lieutenant said, and laughed at me, "it will not keep love away."

"Do not let us," I begged, "speak of love."

"We will not then," he said. "Let us speak of London instead. When would you wish to go there?"

I thought quickly. "Upon the twenty-second of April," I said.

"It is as good a day as any." He put out a hand. "I came to London first myself on that day. Wilt think of me?"

"Yes," I said, surprised. "Yes."

He stood up and I stood up also.

"And you will not change your mind?" he asked. "Or your plans?"

"No," I answered. All this while I was wondering if the Lieutenant would speak to Master Marshall for me. The thought had not occurred to him, or so it seemed.

"I do prefer my own plan," he went on, "but yours, Mistress Deborah, for a little while at least will do." He stooped for his cloak which had fallen to the floor. "There are one or two things I would have you remember," he said, straightening. "First, that you may always write to me, if you will, care of Dirk Boonstra, Master of the *Hiltje*, Rotterdam. Then, if you should stand in need of friends while you are in London I would have you remember *The Red Cow* at Wapping. You must ask there for Ralph Turner, the landlord, or for Mistress Alice, his wife. He is red-bearded and red-headed, a thick-set giant of a man; Mistress Alice is grey and small and bustling a little. When you go there for the first time you should enquire if the *Hiltje* is in from Rotterdam. That will be your password. You might, though it is unlikely, encounter Dirk Boonstra himself there or even Captain Gaunt."

"I have heard," I said, "of Captain Gaunt."

"All Wapping has heard of him," the Lieutenant said. His hands upon my shoulders he kissed me twice. "Once," he said, "as I promised. And once because I am leaving you." He looked down at me. "Art sorry?"

"A little," I said.

He turned from me. "Why, that is something," he declared, his hand on the latch. "A man should have something worth remembering to take with him upon a journey."

Almost as quietly as he had come he was gone again.

I could hear him singing softly to himself as he untied his horse:

“Where is my thought?
Where wanders my desire?
Where may the thing be sought
That I require?”

Where indeed? I asked, an odd clutch of pain, part grief, part longing, about my heart.

* * *

As soon as possible after the tenth of March when Captain Julian, as I had expected, returned from Holland and visited us regularly again I spoke to my aunt, as I was in duty bound to do, of what was in my mind.

“I can see,” I said, “that you and Captain Julian are resolved to marry each other though you have not once spoken to me of your plans.”

My aunt excused herself swiftly. “If I had been less conscious of your disapproval, Deborah, I would have spoken. I own it was wrong of me not to do so. But you have been so cold to me of late, and so hostile, it was difficult for me to speak. As for Captain Julian, he has no thought in his head except of what concerns me.” She paused, then went on. “I have been anxious for you, Deb, I do confess. I was in great hopes, to speak truly, that the Lieutenant would make you an offer which you would accept. Did he not do so that night when he came so late and brought us all so many gifts?” Her eyes scanned my face. “I am certain now that he did and that you refused him.” She reproached me. “Oh, why did you do so? An offer of marriage is not so small a thing.”

“I know that it is not,” I said. “But I have other plans.” I told her of them.

Had I spoken to the Lieutenant of what was in my mind? she wished to know. “Yes,” I said.

“And he has not discouraged you?” She clapped her hands. “Then it is settled. The lady will not refuse you, I am certain.

When will you go?" She spoke anxiously.

"Upon the twenty-second of April," I said.

"So soon?" She passed a hand over her face as if she were brushing something no stronger than gossamer — perhaps it was regret — away.

At once she turned practical. I might, she said, have all that remained of my uncle's store of guineas for myself. She would not need them now. She blushed as she spoke, then hurried on. And I must take the blue frieze cloak with the fur-lined hood which the Lieutenant had included among his Christmas gifts and which she had, selfishly, she declared, taken for herself.

Having advanced so far she faltered suddenly. "But still," she said, turning to me in a small rush of warmth, "I do not altogether like your adventuring to London alone, Deborah. It cannot be good." She put an arm round me. "Would you not stay with us and marry the Lieutenant? Would that not be best?"

I smiled at her. "I am not so set upon marrying as you are."

At once her look changed. Her mouth that had grown curved and tremulous tightened and turned thin. Her arm dropped to her side. Leaning forward, she kissed me briefly. "You will come to it," she said.

PART FOUR

I SET OUT

I SET OUT

ON THE twenty-second of April I set out with Gramercy in the little pony cart from Starvecrow. This time Gramercy, not I, held the reins.

By two of the clock, in the first hours of the morning, in a world glistening with new-fallen rain, I was on board the London coach from Lyme.

My departure from the one place I had known and loved would have been sad enough if I had not resolved to put regret behind me. I tried not to remember how the gentlemen had come tumbling out of this same inn from which I was setting forth to the feast my uncle and aunt had prepared for them, nor how, laughing and merry after they had wined and dined, they had left us again to attend their Council of War with the Duke in the same place. I gave one glance towards the house on the cliff top which had been ours, then looked no more.

So we bid goodbye; we move on through life. And why not? The way we take is a round journey after all.

From his seat beside the coachman the guard sounded his horn; the postilion at the last moment leaped expertly into the saddle of the leading horse, and we were off, sooner than I had expected, faster than I had thought possible up the steep hill out of Lyme. In order to divert my thoughts I looked about me. The sky was bright with stars; there was a whisper of wind in the tall hedges, the shadows were soft and blurred.

I had been leaning forward to look for the first signs of the dawn. I sat back now, my hood pulled well forward so that it shadowed my face. I wrapped my hands in my cloak; I kept my small bundle warmly upon my knee; I closed my eyes and hoped vaguely that the French Huguenot who had taken his place at the last moment on the roof and the Breton sailor who had climbed after him, both of whom were very merry, would not fall off and delay us greatly. In spite of much shaking and jolting due to the roughness of the roads I slept.

I woke finally when we were in Shaftesbury. On my way with the rest of the company to the dining-room of *The White Horse Inn* where we halted I was astonished to hear a voice I had heard only once before and had hoped never to hear again. Six feet tall, plumed hat under one arm, my gentleman of the maroon-coloured coach whom Mary Blake had declared to be Sir Roger L'Estrange, accosted me from an open doorway on my left. "So we meet again, mistress, for the third time."

I rallied as best I could from so sudden an encounter. "Surely it is no more than the second time, sir," I said.

"The first," said he, "was on the Taunton road when my coach overturned — remember? — and your fool of a man shammed dead and lay among the clovers. The second was on some God-forsaken highway skirting the down near Lyme, at August's end, in a thick sea mist." He frowned on me. "Four coaches with out-riders — do you not recollect them? And you, poor dishevelled nymph, thrust a second time into the ditch?"

I remembered the occasion well. It was the climax for me of that night when Oliver was captured, when one boat and one boat only got away. For a moment I experienced it all again: the swirling mists, the sudden fall of the ground into the deep-cut channel of the road, and the coach wheels bearing down on me so suddenly, and the lash of the coachman's whip, and the glimpse, seen for an instant only, of Judge Jefferies' face.

I saw it again and yet I spoke steadily. "I had no sight of you, sir, on that or on any other night."

He kept his eyes on mine. "But you were there?"

"Why should I not be there?" I answered.

He drew nearer. "Why should you? On that night? In that spot?" He waited, then shrugged clumsily. "You may forget it if you wish."

I dropped him a small curtsey. "I thank you, sir. It is a night I shall never forget."

"Still reckless?" He shook his head. "I cannot approve so much recklessness. But let us eat." He laid a compelling hand on my elbow as he spoke, thrusting me towards the dining-room. I could not help but do as he wished.

We continued in this manner. Once within the dinning-room,

he cracked his fingers in the same masterful fashion and the landlord came running.

"This lady and I, landlord," said he, "will breakfast if you please at a table apart from the company."

"I cannot, sir, I thank you." I drew back.

"What, do you not eat?" he asked. "Come," he said, "let us keep each other company. I do hate to eat alone."

I was conducted towards a table and almost thrust into a chair. It was almost like a kidnapping, I thought. Unless I was willing to draw attention to myself — and I was not — I must for a little while endure this man's company. At least I might learn something of what was in his mind while he for his part would not fail, I was certain, to discover what was in mine.

So it proved. Hardly had the grilled collops of lamb and the hot sausages been set before us than my gentleman, after a somewhat lengthy opening, began to ply me with questions. All this he did most skilfully.

"You may wonder, mistress," said he, "that I should patronise the common coach. I find it useful now and then to do so. For my part I cannot help but marvel that so personable a young woman" — here he favoured me with a stiff bow — "as yourself should travel unaccompanied. Have you no relatives, no friends to protect you?" He lifted a finger. "Stay, I remember now. You have one friend. I have heard of him. A Lieutenant in H.M. Forces, was he not? But resigned now. And for the wrong reasons. I marvel, mistress, again I marvel that it should be so. Could you not love a loyal gentleman?"

"I could not love one who was not loyal, sir." I said.

Over a flagon of warmed ale he questioned me again. "Where will you go to in London, mistress, when we arrive?"

I lied as bravely as I could. "I have friends to go to, sir, and a place waiting for me."

One eyebrow, I think his left, shot up as if he were amused.

"And that," he said, "once more, is all that I shall hear."

Sitting back in his chair, he sought for his tooth-pick and used it, eyeing me reflectively all the while.

"I see that you have learned to dissemble a little," he announced finally. "I see also that you may well be more troublesome to

me in the future than you have ever been in the past."

Tooth-pick restored to his vest pocket once more, he leaned forward. "Could you not contrive for your own sake to be discreet?"

"It is a word with several meanings, sir," I returned.

"Only one if you are wise." He tapped the back of my hand with a fleshy forefinger. "Give the law no excuse to hear of you. That is best."

Standing up, he hauled a great silver time-piece, round as a turnip, and as large, from another vest pocket and looked at it.

Fetching me a great bow after that, he lumbered out.

Since all the other passengers appeared to be on the move also I followed him, but not before I had attempted to pay my reckoning and failed. Everything I had eaten was included in Sir Roger L'Estrange's account, I was assured.

With that, though it was vexing in the extreme to me to owe a meal to this man, I was obliged to be content. Within the coach once more I struggled to compose my thoughts. They buzzed like hornets in my brain. I dreaded what might follow from this fresh encounter. I grew sick with fear when I thought of being spied upon; I blamed myself that I should have been so foolish as to speak with him. But I was too green, I thought, and too unversed in these matters. When, I asked myself, should I ever be different? For a moment panic seized me. I had learned nothing from this man but his name and that had been revealed to me beyond any doubt by the landlord of our coaching inn. What, I could not help but ask, had Sir Roger L'Estrange learned from me? Why, nothing, I thought. My mind quietened again. I had spoken of friends. But what friends had I? With the possible exception of the Lieutenant, who was there who would care where I went or what I did? I was so alone in this new world I was adventuring in I could endanger no-one; I was so alone I could have laughed at my own plight, or wept.

I would not weep. Tears would come, I knew. Did they not always come in these days, unwanted, unbidden? — splashing into buckets as one worked, damping dry pillows, falling crystal clear into mushroom stews and hot soups? Odd, I told myself, that one who hated tears as much as I hated them should yet

have shed so many, so unprofitably? And shed them all since June?

While the gentleman busied himself in an opposite corner of the coach with making entries in a large leather note-book, the Huguenot and the Breton sailor climbed once more on to the roof and a stout countrywoman smoking a clay pipe was hoisted with a great deal of merriment on her part into the Basket. To cries of 'Right' from the Guard and 'Let her go' from the coachman we were off once more on the next stage of our journey, our Guard standing up and winding his horn until the town of Shaftesbury and its rosy walls were out of sight.

There were other stages in our journey, all of them well-known. Interesting and varied at first, they grew dull at last. Nothing of any importance happened, I was careful to speak to no-one, Sir Roger L'Estrange held aloof. Towards the afternoon of the fourth day everyone's interest quickened as the last green fields, the farms, the thatched houses of the country-side fell away and London with its suburbs came in sight. The roads we travelled now were crowded with foot passengers and riders, with coloured coaches like our own, with little trotting gigs, with trundling eight-horse waggons and slow hooded carts. Before long the Thames, thronged with wherries and white-sailed craft and whiter swans was to be seen. We glimpsed the great Abbey of Westminster and the King's palace of Whitehall (both of which were pointed out to me), and came at last to Charing Cross. Here, in the yard of *The Golden Cross Inn* our coach, the *Western Flier*, came finally to rest.

Having alighted, I ventured forward a little way, then clutched my bundle to me, amazed for a second at all the different sounds that beat as though suddenly upon my ears — of wheels and horses' hooves on cobblestones, of bells ringing and signs creaking, of street vendors crying their wares — 'Spring Water', 'Ripe Oranges', 'Hot Pies' — of shopmen standing in the open doorways of their shops bawling of what they had to sell. For a second more I stood dismayed at the crowds of foot passengers. They were like a spring tide pouring in, like fish at spawning time, pressing on and on, going where?

Bundle in hand, I moved towards them. Once free of the

courtyard I paused. As I did so I could have cried out from joy. Looking out from the window of the tailor's shop opposite was a face I knew. It receded almost at once. I moved as if to cross the street. But now Sir Roger L'Estrange had me by the arm.

"So there is no-one to meet you, mistress," said he, "after all?"

"You are mistaken, sir." Shaking off his hand, I fled between the sedan chairs crowding the pavement, between the wooden posts that bordered the street, under the horses' noses to the tailor's shop on the other side, and shot within.

A little owlsh man in dark breeches stared at me from out the candle-lit and tallow-smelling dark. He had a pair of tailor's shears drooping slackly from one hand and a pair of Frenchified moustaches that drooped slackly too.

I paused for lack of breath. Was Master Robert Marshall, I enquired, within?

As if his wits had been snipped off with his tacking threads he shook his head.

More by instinct than reason I ran on between piled-up bales of cloth to a half-open door. Long cloak about him, brimmed hat pulled low over his eyes, Master Robert Marshall, my old but slight acquaintance, was sauntering negligently out of sight.

I made after him. We met where a great pillared church came down in wide yellow steps to the cobblestones and a green front of lawn.

"I am Deborah Hawkesley," I announced, halting. "Are you not the same Master Marshall whom I waited upon in my Uncle Edmund's house one night at Lyme?" I paused, for I was unwilling to say more.

He stayed immovable, as grim of face as I remembered him, and uncivil still.

I blundered on. "I must find my way to Stepney. I pray you, let me come some part of the way with you."

He stooped towards me. "What had you and L'Estrange to say to each other just now in the inn yard?"

"He did accost *me*," I said. "And I swore that I had a friend to meet me and ran to you."

"Did you not know I would be here?" he demanded.

I stared at him, bewildered for a moment. "Why, no," said I. Then light dawned on me. I asked, "Did Lieutenant Hobey ask you to meet me?"

"Who else would do so?" He hunched a shoulder and walked on as if he wished only to be rid of me.

"Well, what is to be done?" I asked, following him, "since I am here?"

He turned on me. "This is to be done. Keep away from L'Estrange."

"Have I not told you," I said, "that he accosted me?"

"So that you might betray what business you had here," he said, "and your friends. Women," he declared, "betray men as naturally as they breathe."

"You would not think so badly of women," I returned hotly, "if you had kept better company."

"You have a shrewish tongue," he declared, halting for a second, then going on. "But I was warned of it."

"Who warned you?" I wished to ask. "Who?" It could not have been the Lieutenant, I thought. Or was it after all the Lieutenant? Since I was unwilling to give too much offence I boiled over in silence.

"Where will you go when we are at Stepney?" Master Marshall demanded next. "I agreed to see you on your way. That is all."

"Why, to the Lady Henrietta Wentworth's house," I answered. "Where else?"

"I'll not help you there." He raged again. "I told the Lieutenant so." His feet springing and broad as if he had been bred in Gloucestershire or in some other hilly place he pounded on. Once more I followed.

"The Lady Henrietta will not receive you," he flung over his shoulder. "She receives no-one. And I will not vouch for you."

I caught up with him. "So you suspect me," I said, almost choking. "Me, Deborah Hawkesley. Only you would do so."

He turned on me a second time. "It is I who am suspect, I, Robert Marshall who served two condemned traitors. The Lady Henrietta is suspect also, great lady though she is, and scores

more besides in spite of the King's General Pardon. If you do not understand this you understand nothing."

I gave way suddenly. "I pray you leave me. I will trouble no-one." My bundle beside me, I sat down. Truly, for the moment at least I felt I could continue upon my feet no longer. From one cause or another everything after that turned dark. If this were swooning I would never do it for pleasure, I thought, my head between my knees.

Master Marshall's voice came to me irritably as though from a long way off. "What ails you?" His breath, smelling strongly of tobacco, fanned my cheek. "Here, drink this." He thrust a flask of brandy into my hand.

I drank from it. No longer far off, I heard him say, "If you are empty you may have a mutton pie."

I was given a mutton pie, the first of all the mutton pies that were to prove so almost fatal to me and lacked all stomach for it.

"If you will tell me," I said, "where in Stepney my Lady Henrietta's house is I will not trouble you further." I struggled to my feet.

For answer Master Marshall hailed a hackney coach and thrust me in, and got in himself. Stretching out both legs and folding his arms, he commanded me, "Eat your pie."

"I cannot," I said and threw the pie out of the window.

"You've a nasty temper," he observed, "as well as a shrewish tongue. From now on you can starve." He crossed his legs. "When you get to Stepney Great House and are not received what will you do?"

What indeed? I thought. From the fumes of the brandy I could neither think what I would do nor answer him.

Our two tired horses clip-clopped on past fine merchants' houses, between tree-lined streets, past smooth shining ponds swimming with ducks and fringed with reeds. By this time a pleasant indifference had invaded me. If I were not received at Stepney Great House I would speak to the nearest Watchman, I resolved, I would ask the advice of the first decent female body I might meet. So great a city could not be filled only by spies and uncivil sorts of serving gentlemen. Somewhere and somehow I would find a roof over my head.

From weariness I leaned my head against the back of the coach; I shut my eyes. Almost at once, unknown to me, I slept. I woke to a sudden lurching of the coach. In an effort to recover my balance I found myself beating what amounted to a tattoo upon Master Marshall's chest. The coach lurched to a standstill.

"Compose yourself," I heard him say, "and leave off hammering me. This is Stepney Great House."

* * *

It would be tedious to relate all that followed our arrival. One official person after another received us and went away. At last Mrs Chloe Hopper, whom Marshall informed me was my Lady Henrietta's confidential maid, appeared. She was small and neat of figure and medium dark. Cherry-coloured ribbons were threaded in her white frilled cap, grey slippers with cherry-coloured heels peeped out from under her grey gown.

Marshall greeted her in familiar but soldierly fashion. "Mistress Chloe, here is Mistress Deborah Hawkesley come to the Lady Henrietta from Lyme. Hawkesley is her right name — I can vouch for that, and her family were of the right kind too. For the rest she will speak for herself."

He turned to me. "Good-day to you, mistress. I have done what I was sent to do."

I had hard work with Mrs Chloe when he was gone. There was no more warmth in her than there is in a gilded door knob in spite of her bright shine.

"My lady is sick," she informed me in neat clipped tones, "and sleeping now, and must not be disturbed. And my Lady Philadelphia Carey, my lady's mother, has gone to the play and to sup afterwards in Bedford Square. And if the truth be told, mistress, we have too many of your sort for ever knocking at my lady's door. If you hope to take service under my lady I must tell you she has servants enough."

At this point her eyes, whether by accident or design, fell upon my hands. When she saw how cracked and rough they were from the labours I had performed at Starvecrow, her manner changed. She dismissed me loftily: "To-morrow. Will you not come to-morrow?"

"I have a letter for your lady," I said. "Will you not deliver it to her?"

"A letter! Then you are asking for money," Mrs Chloe said.

"By no means." I spoke warmly. "I have money of my own."

"Oh." Clearly Mrs Chloe did not believe me. She took the letter. "But I shall not trouble my lady with it," she warned, "unless I must."

How foolish was I, I thought, on my way to the park gates once more. I had built a pretty castle in Spain for myself, all rosy pinnacles and crystal towers. It was vanished quite and I was left with no place yet in which to sleep.

I moved on through the park gates. Master Marshall was waiting there, his back to me. I passed him as if he were invisible and turned once more towards Stepney.

He caught up with me. "Where will you go now?"

I did not answer him.

"You must put your pride in your pocket, mistress," he said, and laid hold of my arm.

I did my best to laugh. "I have no pocket large enough," I said. And then, from having laughed too soon, I came very near weeping.

He spoke more patiently than he had spoken yet. "Mrs Chloe will find you a bed for the night if I speak to her. Shall I speak to her? As for to-morrow — "

He left to-morrow where it was, nicely poised on the other side of night.

I put my pride in my pocket and came with him. To speak truly, after all that I had experienced that day the thought of bed was overmastering and sweet.

* * *

To-morrow came and I waited once more in Mrs Chloe's room. The Lady Henrietta would speak to me after breakfast, I had been told.

Breakfast came and went. After dinner then, Mrs Chloe declared. Dinner, which was at twelve, followed. I waited still.

Mrs Chloe, while busily embroidering a white satin nightgown for my Lady Philadelphia, kept me near her. I held her skeins of

silk. I picked up her scissors when she dropped them, which she did surprisingly often, and listened to her talk.

My Lady Philadelphia was thrifty, I gathered. For that reason she would have her nightgowns stitched at home. "Wearing out my fingers," Mrs Chloe complained, "as she did my mother's before me. Now Mrs Nelly Gwynne and my Lady Castlemaine, as she was then, for my mother served them both, would always buy their nightgear from the new shops in the Exchange. As all the world knows, they were Ladies of Convenience to the late King Charles who denied them nothing from Dukedoms for their sons to silver bedsteads for themselves.

"My Lady Philadelphia, unlike them, has always been virtuous," Mrs Chloe continued, "and though there is much honour in being virtuous, Mistress Hawkesley, there is no profit in it. And now she is beginning to love again. If you stay long enough — I doubt if you will — you may set eyes upon her flame.

"He would not be my choice — he is too old for that — but many a good tune is played on an old fiddle, they say. To my certain knowledge his music is by no means done."

Here she sought for her scissors once more; once more I found them for her.

"If you are so fortunate," she went on, snipping a thread as she spoke, "as to speak to my Lady Henrietta, do not be surprised to find her a trifle absent in manner. She never was properly of this world and now she is so ill as to be halfway to the next."

Holding needle and thread up to the light, she spoke abruptly. "Have you a man of your own?"

"Not since September," I said. Leaning forward, I took needle and thread from her. Having threaded the needle swiftly I returned it to her again.

"How you do snatch," she observed.

"Have you no friends?" she asked.

"None," I said. "Unless I have some at an inn on Thameside called *The Red Cow*."

She put down her work. "What do you know of *The Red Cow*?"

"Very little," I said. "Is it famous for some reason then?"

"That is a clever answer." She began, too quickly again, to

fold up my Lady Philadelphia's nightgown. "I think you are not so simple as you seem."

"Few of us are that," I said.

"There you go again." Mrs Chloe stood up. "You are too clever. And I must repeat what you have said of *The Red Cow* to my Lady Henrietta."

"Pray do," I said.

I waited unhappily after she had left me. Once more, it seemed to me, I had been indiscreet.

Presently Mrs Chloe returned. The lady would see me now, I was told.

I followed her. Presently again, I who had never loved one of my own sex yet in all my life, apart from my cousin Dinah and Mary Blake, loved simply, without idolatry, at first sight.

The Lady Henrietta sat before a small fire in a long green-panelled room in a stiff gown of greenish-blue, looped over a petticoat of orange silk. I curtsied to her. Her eyes were turquoise-coloured like her gown; her hair was lint-white, crinkled and curled by nature more than art in a soft upstanding fuzz about her face.

I related all that there was to know about myself. I kept nothing back, I repeated the Lieutenant's advice to me, I spoke of *The Red Cow*. But first I said; "My lady, I must tell you that Master Marshall will not vouch for me while Mistress Chloe, I fear, suspects me."

She spoke quickly. "But I do not."

When I told her all there was to tell she asked one question only; "Mistress Hawkesley, why did you come to me?"

"I was foolish," I said. "I listened only to my heart."

"And it told you what?"

"It told me in the midst of my trouble," I said, "to think of yours. It told me that there was surely work in London that I might do, for you first, and then for the Cause. But I was foolish," I said again. "I am ignorant of so many things, I do nothing very well."

"Did your head tell you nothing?" she asked, smiling.

"That I must leave Starvecrow." I said, "that I must begin again. I could think only of London and of you, and after that,

of the Cause. One can think only of what one knows.”

She held both hands to the fire. “What useful things could you do for me? Could you make Lime Tisane?”

“Why, yes,” said I, surprised.

“In the gardens at Gouda in Holland,” she said, “where His Grace of Monmouth and I were that last time there was an avenue of Limes, and in the little garden with the box hedges by the fountain where the lead Cupids played, a Magnolia tree. I used to sit under it in the warm days and play upon my lute and sometimes sing, and when my cough troubled me the Duke would bring me Lime Tisane to drink.”

She looked at me. “Could you not feed my parrot also? – if it is not too small a task for you – and talk to him? He feels my illness and mopes because of it.”

“I would gladly feed him,” I said, “and talk to him.”

“Then stay,” she said, standing up. “Though I may not be able to keep you with me for long.”

* * *

My Lady Henrietta seldom needed Lime Tisane; her parrot, on purpose to spite me, I believe, continued to mope; my Lady Philadelphia Carey passed me when we met as if I were another picture on the wall. From so much ease I grew sleek and smooth. My days were much alike. In the mornings, when the birds sang clearest and the dew weighed down the grass blades I walked in the park that lay about the house. In the afternoons my lady and I talked. I would describe the life we lived at Starvecrow and before that. I would repeat, for she never tired of hearing it, all that I could remember of what His Grace of Monmouth did and said when he came to Lyme.

Sometimes I would read to her. Now and then after long pauses she would talk to me. I remember the silences between us best they were so full once more of things unsaid, and the quiet of the room, and my lady quieter than all the rest in her turquoise and orange gown.

It was a strange muted world we lived in then in which all sounds seemed echoes only.

It ended sooner than I thought. One evening at dusk, when I looked out of the window of the room I shared with Mistress Chloe I caught back my breath in alarm at what I saw.

Mrs Chloe, who was pinning a new-fashioned cap shaped like a half-folded fan upon her hair, crossed over to the window, twirling the cap round on the four fingers of one hand as she did go. "Why," she asked, "did you start up in so much alarm?"

"Because I had hoped never to set eyes upon that particular coach or its owner again," I said.

"Then you will be disappointed." She returned to her place. "The owner is my Lady Philadelphia's flame of whom I spoke."

"Sir Roger L'Estrange?" I said.

"The same. Why not?" Mrs Chloe said.

* * *

My alarm at first was great. But gradually, as the days passed and the knight and I did not encounter each other I grew easier in my mind. At first I had cut short my morning walks in the park but then, with some caution still, I continued them.

It was fine spring weather. There were songs and sweet sounds everywhere, the primroses were opening in the small oak wood that stretched away from the house, the dog violets were already a mist of blue in the new grass. I found it difficult to keep indoors.

On this particular morning I sat at the edge of the wood, my lap full of primroses. Quite soon I would go in, I told myself, quite soon. I dreamed instead of our garden on the cliff top and the murmur of the sea below and the sound of my uncle's bees in the crocuses. I wished myself there; I wished London were many miles away. And then, in response to a small stir about me I looked up;

Sir Roger L'Estrange stood a few feet away. He greeted me: "So you lack company, mistress?"

Looking like an old handsome rooster in his plumed hat and frilled breeches, he drew nearer.

"Well, what is to be done?" he asked briskly. "For one in your circumstances only one of two things. You must marry

or find a protector."

"I have no mind for either, sir," I said.

"No mind?" said he. "What has mind to do with it? 'Tis a woman's plain duty to consent to everything a man proposes, even if it is always the same thing. To have a protector, mistress, is to enjoy all the pleasures of matrimony with none of the pains. But I'll not argue with you. So you have arrived at Stepney Great House. What do you do here?"

"I wait upon the Lady Henrietta," I said.

"And I," he said, lifting up the skirts of his fine coat and seating himself gingerly not far from me, "wait upon the Lady Philadelphia. One story is as true as the other. And how do Mrs Chloe and all the other little vixens in the lady's service speak of me?"

"As the Lady Philadelphia's flame, sir," I said, "if you must be told."

"No more than that?" He waited.

"No more," I said. "I have heard you called the Bloodhound of the Press also, sir. But she who spoke of you in those terms is dead."

He clapped a hand on my knee. "What do you know of printers or the press?"

"Only that they offend against the law for liberty's sake, and are punished, and offend again," I said.

"Canting Puritan rogues," he declared, "every one of them. Who are they to take upon themselves the printing of matter H.M. King James has not licensed to be printed? All they do is for liberty, they say, all their concern is that Englishmen shall know the truth. I would give them the liberty of Newgate and the freedom of the Gatehouse gaol. There I'd leave 'em to feed on Liberty and Truth."

On his feet once more he leaned over me. "Direct your sympathies elsewhere, mistress. 'Elsewhere.'" He straightened. "I could be your enemy or your friend. You may choose. So now I'll leave you to your primmyrosing." He tossed two primroses that he had picked himself into my lap — it was an odd childish gesture that was somehow like him, I thought. Puffing a little, he moved off.

I stayed quiet for a while. A rabbit loped warily over the grass, a wren trilled sharply from a neighbouring bush, a brimstone butterfly set off unsteadily on its first flight. I could decide nothing. Retreat appeared necessary for me once more, and yet, once again, there seemed no way that I could take.

* * *

Some three days later my fine gentleman burst in on me while I sat in Mrs Chloe's room darning a fine kerchief of lawn. "So I find you alone, mistress?"

"Mrs Chloe will be back shortly, sir," I said and prayed it might be true.

He straddled the rug before me. "What if I tell you she is out with my Lady Philadelphia?"

"I would say you were mistaken." I stood up.

"Nevertheless I have a mind to begin even if I may not finish," he declared and laid hold of my hands.

I struggled with him. "If you will have it rough you shall," he said and closed with me.

He tore my kerchief from my neck and threw it down. He thrust one knee between my thighs most brutally. His mouth and his whole body bore hard on mine, thrusting me back and further back, plaguing me grievously. I cried out, but I had little strength and scarcely any senses left from the power of the man and some fatal melting weakness within myself.

If it had not been for the rustle of Mrs Chloe's petticoats in the corridor and her hand on the door the affair might have gone as ill with me as with many another before my time. But Mrs Chloe came in and paused most tellingly.

Thrusting me to one side, Sir Roger elbowed his way out, puffing loudly all the while.

"So he has been at *you*," Mrs Chloe said. She crossed the room. "What a fright the man has made of you, to be sure. Cover yourself, do."

I stooped for my kerchief. I smoothed my hair. "He has molested you also," I said.

"And every other young female person," she declared, "within

miles." Keys dangling from one finger she approached my Lady Henrietta's desk. "I was to get something for my lady, but I have clean forgotten what. Ah, now I remember I was to bring her her Lavender smelling salts."

My lady's bottle of smelling salts in one hand, she turned to me.

"Shall I tell my lady of Sir Roger L'Estrange's attempt upon you?"

"No, do not," I replied. "But I must go from here, Mrs Chloe," I said miserably.

"The sooner the better," she said, very crisp.

* * *

For the rest of that day and for the two days that followed I was left very much to my own company. I was glad, therefore, when Mrs Chloe suggested that I might come with her into London and out again in my Lady Philadelphia's coach, Will Sheldon, our second coachman, on the box. She would leave me at Neller's, the haberdasher's at the corner of the Strand, and pick me up at four of the clock in the same place.

I was duly set down outside Master Neller's shop; Mrs Chloe vanished inside and I was alone.

It was an instinct of mine when I did not know which direction to take to turn right. I turned right now. I directed my steps towards the City and what I learned afterwards was Ludgate Hill. The traffic of wheels, the hubbub of sound, the fast-moving streams of people delighted me; I felt I trod on air; all London, it seemed, moved in step with me. Everywhere the city appeared to be re-building after the Great Fire that had followed the Great Plague. Everywhere frail scaffolding stood up against the sky; masons in white caps and leather jerkins mounted ladders, or walked securely upon planks; everywhere the dull thud of mallets and the clang of hammers could be heard.

I paused outside a large hostelry called *The Bolt in the Tun*. Here a notice in blue lettering on a yellow ground announced that twenty-six coaches would leave every day for the West, and twenty-six more would arrive. The names of Bristol, Taunton, Exeter and Lyme caught my eye and made me homesick also. I

hurried on in what direction I did not know. And then, suddenly, I was caught up short. The great building which confronted me was surely the new St. Paul's which Sir Christopher Wren had begun to build after the Great Fire had destroyed the old.

Having gazed my fill, I moved on and found myself in a cobbled alleyway leading, so a crooked notice said, to *Little Britain* through the *Blue Anchor Yard*. I continued along it. The sign of the blue anchor swung in the middle of the narrow way, the gabled houses leaned closely together, the noonday sun seemed caught in the small leaded window panes. It was quiet here: a yellow mongrel dog licked its sores, a peacock butterfly zig-zagged between the patches of sun and the pointed shadows, a dry wind stirred.

Suddenly again the quiet was filled with sound. Like some flood tide a crowd swept down the way that I had come and advanced on me. It appeared to be made up of apprentices carrying clubs, of shopkeepers, their aprons tucked up; of passers-by and idlers of every sort. I stood to one side. It was useless to do so, for the crowd swept past and swept me along with them. And then I saw, or thought I saw, the cause of so much stir.

From out the Blue Anchor Yard a posse of constables came running. A fine gentleman in a long-skirted coat led them. A little fellow in drab-coloured breeches clung as it were to their skirts. At sight of them the crowd, which had halted for a second, gave chase again only to pause once more in the maze of narrow streets. Why was the crowds chasing the constables? I asked.

More than one voice in the near ranks of the stationary crowd answered me. Sir Roger L'Estrange's Deputy, it seemed, was after the poor printers again on a General Warrant.

What was so wrong with a General Warrant, sirs? I wished to know.

What is wrong with it? Half a dozen heads turned my way. People spoke indignantly. There was nothing right with it, they said.

"What's more," a burly mason spoke up now, "we'll have no General Warrant served in the City of London if we know it. 'Tis clean contrary to the law."

My immediate neighbour, a quiet Quakerish-looking man, spoke quietly. "If your name is on a General Warrant, mistress, you can be arrested for anything, or for nothing, and clapped into gaol, into Newgate or elsewhere, and held without trial and, as likely as not never be heard of again."

Who were the two men with the constables? I asked.

The fine gentleman was L'Estrange's Deputy, I learned, the little frightened fellow was his Informer.

My quiet-looking friend spoke again. "They are after Mrs Calvert. It is she who has been informed against. The poor woman does no more than carry on her late husband's trade."

"And he was a printer?" I said.

"Ay," half a dozen voices answered. "Clapped into Newgate gaol and kept there in the late King's reign and brought out only to die."

At this point a fresh shout arose.

"There they are," someone behind me cried. "There."

We were off again. Once more the crowd, carrying me with them, swept on, down narrow passageways, past hidden courts, round garbage pools, over greasy cobblestones. As if I had been caught up in a wave of the sea I was thrown up at last like a piece of flotsam upon the stones.

The crowd flowed on. I looked about me and saw that I was not alone. An apprentice sat in the gutter not far from me, legs sprawled, holding a sleeve of his shirt to a bloody nose. I straightened my skirts, brought my knees together and listened. From the sounds that reached me the crowd appeared to be turning back. At once the apprentice was on his feet. He encouraged me. "Come on, wench. Never say Die." Shirt sleeve held to his nose, he made off. Skirts held high, I followed.

No Cretan labyrinth was ever half so mazy as the way we travelled through narrow twisting alleys and airless courts, past gaping walls and doors marked still with the plague cross in red and the plague prayer — 'Lord have mercy upon us.'

Lord have mercy upon me, I thought at last, for the apprentice had vanished and I was left behind and lost indeed. At the sound of footsteps I stood still.

Bent almost double, a woman emerged from a small door in an

opposite wall. She had a white cap on her head, a white apron over her dark gown. She carried another apron of coarse sacking neatly rolled and tied with its own tapes, in one hand. For a second she paused. She appeared to me to be more wary than afraid.

I moved towards her. By some instinct I knew what I must do and say. "Pray come with me, ma'am," I said. "Two may go safely where one will fail."

I took off the long cloak of blue frieze that I wore and wrapped it about her. I drew the hood over her white cap. I twined a scarf about her neck.

Only now did she draw off from me. "I'll not have it too tight — yet," she said, smiling.

"I think you must be Mrs Calvert," I said. I took her arm. "You must direct me where to go."

"This way then." She pointed to another smaller door which opened by pressure upon a wooden peg. I followed down a small flight of steps to a narrow courtyard. Here, for the first time, she began to drag upon my arm.

"Will you not hurry, ma'am?" I asked, for the hunt once more appeared dangerously near.

"Mistress, I dare trust no-one." She stood still. "Why should I trust you?"

I cast one glance behind me. "Will you trust the constables then?"

She sighed once, then looked back. "We must face them, it seems."

We waited while half a dozen constables burst in on us and a section of the crowd followed. Mercifully L'Estrange's Deputy and the Informer were nowhere to be seen.

At once, while the crowd looked on, our interrogation began. Where were we from, the constables demanded. What was our business in Little Britain?

I answered for Mrs Calvert and myself as best I could. I was in temporary service, I said, at the Lady Philadelphia Carey's house and this — I had Mrs Calvert by the arm — was my aunt, Mrs Margaret Julian from the West country. As for our business in Little Britain, we had none. Having come up to London to look

at the new St. Paul's, we had been caught up in the crowd and swept on with them.

Here I was fortunate, for the apprentice from whom I had only just parted pressed forward. "I can vouch for that last, sirs," he said, "for the young woman and I only recently shared the same ditch." He touched his nose. "By my bloody nose I swear it. And her dragged petticoats."

For the moment this appeared to be proof enough. The crowd closed round us protectively; the constables withdrew somewhat unwillingly and we were escorted, as it were, towards the Strand.

By Hanging Sword Alley we parted company. The crowd dispersed; Mrs Calvert declared that she would go to Southwark by water where she would rest quietly for a while. My mind full of every kind of perturbation, I made what haste I could towards Master Neller's shop. With every step I took the full consequences of what had happened were borne in on me. Among the whirl of thoughts that filled my mind only one thing showed clear, that I must leave Stepney Great House before the constables came in search of me; at all costs to myself I must be gone before any fresh suspicion could fall upon my Lady Henrietta. I had declared my intention of leaving after my encounter with Sir Roger L'Estrange. That had been a small unsavoury matter: this was different. Now indeed, as soon as even Mrs Chloe could desire, I must be gone.

I was so troubled and vexed at the thought of this fresh trouble I had brought upon myself my wits almost failed me, I stumbled a little as I walked, I had no words when I arrived with which to answer Mrs Chloe's reproaches. Though I heard them and have remembered them to this day, they meant nothing to me.

One hand on my elbow, she steered me towards my Lady Philadelphia's coach, scolding all the while: "Your petticoats are spattered with mud and you are late. And where is your cloak? You must be clean out of your mind to have lost it."

Only when we were within the coach and upon our way could I bring myself to relate a part at least of what had happened.

She shot up at once in fresh alarm. "All this is dangerous. We cannot have the constables in Stepney Great House."

I reassured her. "You will not have them."

"Then you will be leaving," she said. "When will you speak to my Lady Henrietta?"

"As soon as possible," I answered.

"Early this evening then." She sought for her handkerchief and began as though in relief to sprinkle Lavender Water upon it. "Faugh," she declared, handkerchief to her nose, "how this London mud does smell. I cannot abide it." She took away the handkerchief and spoke angrily. "To tell the truth, Mistress Deborah, all that you have told me stinks of treason and folly and I know not what else."

And that was almost the last word I had from Mrs Chloe.

* * *

Early that same evening I made my way to my lady's room.

The parrot's cage — it was my duty to move it at sunset — hung in the window between the blue velvet curtains; Poll Parrot moped as usual upon his perch; my lady had a book open upon her knees.

She greeted me at once, her face bright. "I have found them, Deborah, those lines of Master John Donne's that I was seeking. Do you remember them?"

"Yes," I said. I could hear the dullness in my own voice.

She closed the book and spoke quietly. "You did not come, I think, to hear me quote Master John Donne to you."

I drew nearer her. "I must leave you, my lady. I must leave you soon." I told her why.

All the while I was speaking Poll Parrot was sidling up and down his perch excitedly.

I finished my tale. "I must leave you, my lady," I said, greatly moved, "and I have not served you half enough."

"Go, do go," Poll Parrot screamed, clinging to the bars of his cage, "go now."

My lady was on her feet, trembling a little and white-faced as much, I think, from the screaming of Poll Parrot as from anything that I had said.

"I cannot help you, Deborah," she declared, "nor keep you with me, though I wish I might. As you know, I am bound for another place."

"I know," I said. I kissed her hand; she kissed my cheek.

"Goodbye," the parrot screamed, "goodbye."

So I said goodbye. I came away. It seemed a strange leave-taking.

Once outside the room I ran, childishly again, from my own thoughts and the parrot's screams and the last glimpse I had of the Lady Henrietta's face. The wind from the open doors of the hall met me, the green walls like the green down streamed past. I met Mrs Chloe on her way to my lady's room and passed her without a word; I heard footsteps coming towards me and paid no heed to them; I rounded a corner and ran full tilt into Marshall himself.

He held me at arms length and the blue cloak I had lent Mrs Calvert slid from his arm to the floor.

"In a passion again," he observed. "What is it now?"

"Where did you get my cloak?" I demanded.

"Where do you think?" He stooped for it. "Put it on."

When I held it in both hands, for I could never bring myself to do at once what anyone commanded, he said — he was enjoying himself, I felt — "Are you not setting off with me in another hackney coach? Before L'Estrange's Deputy and the Constables come looking for you?"

I stared at him.

"When you told the constables your aunt was with the Lady Philadelphia Carey at Stepney Great House you were over-bold," he said. "So get your bundle and come. Quickly."

All the way from Stepney, past the stretch of common and the long rows of merchants' houses only one thought possessed my mind. I scarcely dared speak of it for fear of what Marshall would say. Twice I opened my mouth, twice I shut it again.

Without looking at me he said, "Out with it."

I swallowed hard. "Why," I asked, "should I not work with Mrs Calvert and the printers?"

"Why in God's name," he said, "should you not return where you belong?"

I shut my eyes as if to escape the violence with which he spoke. "I will not," I said.

"I cannot compel you to go home," he declared. "But you

will do nothing where Mrs Calvert is concerned without my consent."

We will see, I thought. The tears – never far from the surface with me in these days – pricked my eyes.

With no gentle hand Marshall slapped my knee. "Printers and printers' folk do not weep."

"It would spoil the printing presses," I said. "And the ink."

He looked at me. "Why fix on the printers? What are you after? Revenge?"

I shook my head. "Not even that."

"What then?"

"I must go on," I said. "I do not believe I can ever turn back."

"This going on is a habit," he said at last. "I know, for I have it too."

He began to whistle softly and tunelessly to himself while the coach jolted on and the noises of London, that had been no more than a distant rumble when we set out, swelled and drew near. The streets grew busy again, the street vendors about Cheapside cried their wares: 'Fresh Spring Water,' 'Sweet Mitcham Lavender,' 'Hot Pies.'

Marshall ceased to whistle. "Would you like," he said, head half out of the coach window but turned towards me, "a mutton pie?"

I could do nothing better than stare.

"For Mrs Calvert. Are we not going there?" he said.

PART FIVE

I ARRIVE

AT MRS CALVERT'S

AFTER threading one alleyway after another Marshall and I arrived at an iron-studded door. It opened for us and we went in through several box-like rooms so dark and all but windowless they seemed made to case in the dark. In the last of them Mrs Calvert herself waited for us, a lighted candle in a pewter candlestick held as though anxiously in one hand.

I curtsied to her and Marshall began to whisper in her ear. He went on whispering. While he did so I looked about me. What appeared to be a wooden printing-press loomed darkly in one corner; a narrow bed spread with a white counterpane was set decently on the far side; a small round table and two stools filled the centre of the room.

While I marvelled how any woman who had felt the sun could endure so much dark Marshall left without ceremony, and Mrs Calvert came towards me.

She delivered her judgment at once. "Mistress Hawkesley, this life we printers live is too harsh for one who has known more comfortable ways."

"I have known those comfortable ways, ma'am," I said, "and lost them too. I set no store by them now."

"Why should you wish to turn printer?" she asked after a moment. "I was a printer's wife, bred to the trade. So were Mrs Curtis and Mrs Dover and half a dozen more. When our men died it was natural we should continue the work they had begun."

"That is all I wish," I said. "I wish only to continue the work my uncle and others whom I loved began."

"I understand you," she said. "I will not deny that you could be useful to me. But you are mistaken in your opinion of us. There is nothing heroical in what we do. We work hard, we live poorly, we are often afraid, we are generally despised. We know that sooner or later the King's men will hunt us down for printing

matter the King does not approve, which he has not licensed to be printed. We are called a Confederacy, but that is too large a word to describe us. We printers stand by each other, that is all."

That is a great deal, I thought.

"You may wonder," Mrs Calvert went on, "why we go on as we do. It is partly because we are printers and must print to live. It is for liberty also so that one day we may print what we please and English folk may read what they please. But chiefly, I think, we go on because we are stubborn folk."

She had spoken gently so far, but now her voice hardened a little. "Master Marshall has told me that you wish to join us because you have nowhere to go and cannot bring yourself to return to your own people. These are not good reasons, mistress. They are not good because they will not strengthen you for what you must do."

"I have other reasons," I said. "I have told you of them."

She spoke earnestly now. "Come no further, Mistress Hawkesley, along the road we printers travel on. You do not know where it may lead."

"I do know," I said. "Do you think I have not seen enough?"

"And you are determined upon it?" She kept her eyes as she spoke upon my face.

"Yes," I said.

"Then I will say no more. I must leave you to the workings of Providence and the desires of your own heart." She went out in search, I could only suppose, of Marshall, leaving me to the uncertain flicker of candlelight in the dark room and the beating, louder than usual, of that same heart.

* * *

From that day, as servant to the printing trade, I took on more completely than before a new self. I will not say it was strange to me, for we are more persons than one, we exist in layers, our thoughts and actions spring as often as not from impulses that are more than surface-deep, we surprise ourselves. From that day the outer self I had always known was as though stripped away; new qualities more fitted to the life I had to live now came to the surface.

I could not altogether approve my new self. When I was sheltered and loved I had no need to dissemble. Except for occasional youthful spurts of temper I had always been kind. Those days were past. My time at Starvecrow had chilled and hardened me; King James's vengeance had taught me how to hate. The printers were hunted folk; I had chosen, however humbly, to share their dangers. From this time on I knew that my first duty must always be to serve them, and after that, to escape.

This at least is what I told myself. In practise I behaved more than once very differently. On two occasions at least my heart, never the coldest part of me, took charge of my head. How ashamed I should be now if it had not done so!

Meanwhile I studied my trade. Its secrets were not made known to me all at once. I progressed, as it were, by inches; I learned by stages only. But still I learned.

Mrs Calvert would have me know all the back streets of the City after dusk as well as by day. Since there were few tall buildings completed yet that would serve as landmarks in the new London that Sir Christopher Wren was building I was often lost. But gradually I grew more confident. Our sudden flittings — across the river to Southwark, or eastwards to Hackney and Shoreditch, or, it might be, no further than the dark cellar over the way, no longer alarmed me. I have lost count of them. Warned overnight that the King's men had news of our whereabouts we were gone in the next hour or before it was day. We retreated first; our gear, including our dismantled printing presses, followed in hand barrows, in brewer's drays or carrier's carts.

So the work went on and Mrs Calvert and I survived. We could not have done so if many ordinary citizens, and a few who were not at all ordinary, like Alderman William Kyffen of the City of London and my Lord Halifax had not helped rather than hindered what we did. We could count also on the support of many Nonconformist ministers while large numbers of Thames watermen as well as the majority of London's apprentices were on our side. Help came to us from many unexpected quarters. There were constables who turned a blind eye on our comings and goings; there were members of the Watch who could be relied upon when a search was made to look for us diligently in the wrong place.

But the King's agents gave us no peace. If any members of our Confederacy were caught there were always professional perjurers to be found who would swear away our lives and our liberty for a small fee.

Not all those who bought our pamphlets were our friends. Many of them disapproved of what they read. Yet they continued to read. The subjects the illegal printing trade dealt with were in all men's minds — what rights Englishmen might justly claim; whether Parliaments should be freely elected, and by whom; whether King James, as he claimed, should be allowed to dispense with whatever laws he pleased, or indeed, with any part of English law. Because of the interest they aroused our publications found their way into the many Coffee Houses that were being opened everywhere; they were to be discovered on country gentlemen's tables and in the libraries of Anglican clergymen and titled folk as well as in taprooms and taverns and weaving shops. They lay hidden between the pages of Master Tusser's *Husbandry* in prosperous yeomen's houses or were concealed in the Bibles of the better sort of artisans and labouring folk. So great was the demand for the printed matter we supplied we could never print enough copies, or, what was more difficult, distribute them.

I had of course only a very small part in the actual printing processes. Printing was always a skilled trade. The most I ever did was to stir chimney soot and linseed oil over a slow fire to make printer's ink, or hang each printed sheet up to dry as it was pulled, all wet, from the type bed — two tasks I did detest above everything.

Only when the pages of our pamphlets and leaflets were complete and the ink dry upon them did my part begin. I was, in short, no more than one of the many hundreds of men and women, all of whom abler and more skilful than myself, whose task it was to sell and distribute them.

I waited upon coach passengers in the best known inn yards; I mingled with crowds wherever they might be; I visited fairs and joined forces with the street vendors and the market men. In all these places our news sheets and pamphlets lay concealed beneath the other wares I had to sell. One day I would have toffee apples

(which I made myself), laid out for sale upon my tray, or marzipan shapes, or chocolate gingerbreads, or small meat pies. Another week I might carry Coventry ribbons or Honiton laces, or Alcester needles and Redditch pins.

In these early days of my apprenticeship I had always an older woman with me. Like pickpockets we worked together and yet contrived to keep apart. If one was caught the other vanished: that was the rule.

We observed other rules also. We never committed messages to paper but relied on memory and word of mouth only; we never proffered our secret wares to strangers but only to those customers whom we could be certain of and whom we knew.

Hazardous though the work was, I enjoyed it. There was a youthful element in the tricks we played, the disguises we assumed. In these days after the Battle of Weston Moor there was always a feeling of change in the air like a fresh wind blowing, always a sense of time moving on, of time moving our way. Every day was different. Every day was full of incident for me. I who had never left Lyme until now enjoyed rubbing shoulders with so many different sorts of folk, many of whom did their best to spoil me — booksellers and stationers, innkeepers and travelling showmen, apprentices and tradesmen and a host of ordinary looking but often surprising folk.

Among the pack-horse men and waggoners, the Scots pedlars and country carriers who disposed of our wares in greater numbers and more successfully than people like myself could ever do, I had many friends. I might have had admirers enough also, I do not doubt, if I had not laughed at them as merrily as any young woman could.

In the midst of so much that was pleasant I was jerked back for a while into sorrow; I made one more enemy, one moreover whose malice almost destroyed me.

I had been queerly homesick during these last few days of spring. I longed above all for clean sweet air and the feel of a westerly wind blowing in from the open sea.

On this particular day of which I write the sky showed clear; for moments at a time the sun burned. At Queenhithe, where I

had gone on an errand for Mrs Calvert, the Thames swans, wings half furled, sailed silver-white like Cleopatra's barge in old Plutarch's tale upon the Nile.

It was by Paul's churchyard on my way back that Master Geoffrey Knott, a recent acquaintance of Mrs Calvert's and mine, rose up out of the spring grass, serpent-fashion, in a bottle-green coat and tempted me.

I did not like him very well. His manner was too careful for my taste, his look so calculating it had the effect of making me wary too. We had met, most worthily, in Dr. Smith's church at Bow which Mrs Calvert and I, dressed in our best, attended on a Sunday. Master Knott had, I think, marked me down some time before. His moment came on the first of the spring gales. Umbrella unfurled, he presented himself as our very humble and respectful escort when the service was over. He and I met as though by accident several times after that.

There was nothing against him, Mrs Calvert said, and nothing very much in his favour either. His politics, she declared, as far as he appeared to have any, were what you would expect of a young lawyer who was over-careful by nature and had his way to make.

When I told her of the proposal he had made me that I should go for a twirl with him in a hackney coach she looked doubtful at first, and then she laughed. It was a fine day, she said, and I was old enough to look after myself.

At noon Master Geoffrey and I set out. He wore his bottle-green coat and flourished, not very expertly, a silver-knobbed cane which he dropped far too often and retrieved most awkwardly. I had a new muslin kerchief to my old blue gown and some fine new buckled shoes. He appeared to think, which vexed me a little, that I was not fine enough for him.

He talked much of himself, as I had expected him to do, but so gloomily I could not help but feel surprised. He dreamed of riches, it appeared, and of being in some fashion great. I marvelled to hear him, for I had no ambitions of my own unless it was to live in the country and have five sons and keep a number of ducks.

I must have a pond for my ducks, I decided, and a piece of land large enough to support my five sons when Master Knott,

dropping his cane and lunging after it once more, broke in upon my thoughts. "I cannot marry, Mistress Deborah," said he, "until I have achieved my ambitions."

I came away at once from my pond and my ducks and my five sons. "Ambition," said I with a suitably grand air, "must always be served."

At once my companion's brow, which had been somewhat clouded, cleared. "Then you are not interested in marrying?" He gave a quick look at my left hand as he spoke. I wore, of course, no ring. "And you have not," he asked, "been married?"

"No," I said. "No." I spoke cheerfully, though I disliked so many prodding questions.

He flourished his cane. We would drive around, said he, and see the sights. Afterwards we would dine at the *Folly Inn* on the Thames off a roasted fowl and a bottle of wine. He hailed a hackney coach.

I leaned out of the coach window in order to put a little distance between us. A funeral procession coming from the direction of the City caught my eye. I could glimpse the many funeral scutcheons carried high like banners and the long line of mourning coaches and the black nodding plumes of the horses. The traffic, our own coach halting with the rest, pulled to one side as the procession drew near. Two small ragged boys stood bashful and hand-in-hand at the kerbside, passers-by doffed their hats, everywhere in the streets men and women waited, their heads bent.

With an unaccountable clutch of fear I asked myself what great personage was this, travelling out of London for the last time in such pomp and state?

Our hackney-coachman lowered his whip and bent his head. I could hear the slow rumble of wheels and the proud, difficult and perhaps painful step of the horses. The procession drew level and began to pass.

At once I knew why I had felt that clutch of fear. The first mourning coach bore the Wentworth arms upon its doors.

Like someone held in the strange lustre of a dream I waited while the funeral scutcheons, swaying on their long poles of gilt and ebony, were carried past. I looked after them. Would the

procession turn down Hedge Lane upon our right; would it travel, that is, the way His Grace of Monmouth had travelled so many times when he rode out to visit my Lady Henrietta at her great house at Toddington? From Hedge Lane (where the Duke had his own house at that time), to Hampstead, to Edgware, to Hendon, to Astra,* to St. Albans, to Dunstable, to Toddington?

I remembered how my lady had laughed when she listed the names. "He must write them down in his Diary," she said. "He was never good at this dull sort of remembering."

The procession did indeed turn, as I watched, up Hedge Lane. Scarcely knowing what I did I leaned out of the coach window a second time. As I did so I wept. My tears fell almost at Marshall's feet. His gaze flicked contemptuously over me; it lit even more contemptuously on Master Knott. Then, one among the many mourners who followed on foot, he passed. I felt his disapproval keenly. To anyone as observant as he was Master Knott's errand must have appeared plain. Our poor attempt at finery, even the hackney coach must have proclaimed it. What a fool was I, I thought, to sink so low when I had known better things! From all this I began (unjustly, I own), to dislike my companion and be quite out of love with myself. I sank back in my seat.

"Do you weep at every funeral?" Master Knott enquired unpleasantly.

"I weep when I must," I said, "and sometimes when I please."

His chin — he had not a great deal of chin — dropped.

"It was the Lady Henrietta Wentworth's funeral procession," I said.

"His Grace of Monmouth's mistress," said he sharply.

"The Duke," I said, "as everyone knows, always spoke of her as his wife."

"Did you know her?" He leaned forward. "How did you know her?"

I had one hand on the coach door. "I'll not be questioned by you, Master Knott," I said, "and I'll no longer endure your company either."

*Astra = Elstree.

The coach that had started forward as the traffic moved on halted once more.

"So good day to you," I said. I got out and left him gaping. I had finished with him, I thought, though I was mistaken there.

My reckoning with Master Marshall, I realised, was still to come.

Two or three days passed before I saw him again. Then he greeted me harshly. Where was I off to on the day of the Lady Henrietta's funeral, he wished to know.

"To the Folly Inn," I said as bold as if I were indeed made of brass.

"The Folly Inn upon the Thames! That floating bawdy house," said he.

"I knew nothing of it. I know nothing now," I said.

"Could you not have guessed? It is not safe," he said, "for such as you to stir abroad."

I defended myself. "I have come to no harm yet."

"No harm," said he. "How long does it take to come to harm? Or, in these days, bring other folk to harm?"

"When my companion wished to discover how I knew the Lady Henrietta I left him," I said.

"This is worse and worse." Marshall took a step forward. "What a simpleton came out of Dorset when you left."

At his mention of Dorset, a county I could not help but love, I turned angry. "Do not speak of Dorset. Were you not picked off a tombstone by your foster parents in Paul's Churchyard?"

He turned quiet. "Trust a woman," he said, rather slow, "to hit below the belt. What of it?" he asked, going on. "Was it my fault?"

"Was it my fault," I asked, "that I must leave Dorset for this evil-smelling place? I did long for air that day; I was sick to my heart of dark courts and foul backyards and printers' ink."

"I am sick of a good many things too," he said.

Of blood and scaffolds, I thought swiftly, and lost causes and dead friends.

I looked at him. For all that he was somewhat short of stature and scowling greatly, he appeared to me to be a very proper man.

"Forgive me." I spoke humbly, for I did not deserve to be forgiven, I thought.

His mouth softening, he asked after a moment, "Wilt come to Hounslow Camp with me one day?"

I had no love for the King's soldiery yet, but I had always cherished a prancing sort of passion for horses and martial music and a band.

"When?" I asked.

"Presently," he said.

That might be any time, I thought. "Tell me of the Lady Henrietta," I said.

"She has her wish," he answered, "and I have mine."

I waited.

"I have served first one, then the other," he went on. "Now I have none to serve."

"And you are glad?" I said.

"I tell myself so." He looked at me. "As for you, mistress, I have a downright good mind to travel to Amsterdam."

"To Amsterdam?" I said.

"Ay," said he. "The Lieutenant is there."

"Do nothing in that quarter on my account," I cried in alarm.

"Everything I do in these days seems to be on your account," he said quietly.

With that he left me. He left me wondering not for the first time what manner of man he was and what opinion he had of me.

Not until much later could I come to any conclusion. Almost at once the bustle of my new life claimed me and for a time put all thought of Marshall and indeed of anyone else out of my mind.

At Starvecrow I had been held prisoner, as it were, in a small eternity of struggle and of cold. I had believed the Cause was lost, thrust back as lost causes are into a world of failure and of peevish dreams. Already, as I went about my errands for Mrs Calvert and the printers I was persuaded differently. From the evidence of my own eyes I could not help but believe that the Cause had taken new life to itself and was moving on again. And so I looked forward to an end to my apprenticeship and a beginning on my part of the work I had set out to do. Both

were nearer than I thought.

Since the close of the Bloody Assizes King James had won no more victories over his people: instead he had encountered the kind of opposition that might lead on to his own defeat. From the beginning of his reign he had struck hardest at what his people valued most: their Protestant religion which he had sworn to defend, and which they were determined to keep, and their liberty which was more to them by far than any imported dynasty of Stuart kings. And now he struck again.

He did so in order to give vent to his own feelings and appease those of his relative, King Louis of France.

To the disgust of all civilised people, whether Catholic or Protestant, King Louis had recently begun a fresh and even crueller persecution of his French Protestant subjects. Many hundreds had been plundered of their wealth, many more imprisoned or sent as slaves to serve in the Turkish galleys; many hundreds had been forced to take refuge in Holland or in England or overseas.

Of these Monsieur Jean Claude, a famous Protestant divine, was one. He had taken refuge in Holland. While there he had published an account of the persecution he and his fellow Protestants had received at King Louis' hands. Many English people had read what Monsieur Claude had written; many more wished to do so.

So now King James must order the burning in public by the common hangman of Monsieur Claude's book.

The burning had been fixed for May the fifth at the old Royal Exchange. Half London was expected to attend. For this reason Mrs Calvert had decided that she and I must be there also.

She wished, she said, moving about the room as her habit was when she had any knotty question to decide, that she might have some pages of M. Claude's book printed so that she might sell them at the burning. But since that was not possible, she would make do with Colonel Algernon Sidney's dying speech upon the scaffold in the late King Charles's time. It would suit this occasion very well, for truth had been treason when Colonel Sidney was condemned, and truth, as the burning of M. Claude's book showed, was reckoned as treason now. Her mind made up, she came to her decision very cheerfully.

My pulse leapt, then quietened when I learnt what was

expected of me. I prayed I might do well; I feared (for I was never half as confident as I seemed) that I might, in Mrs Calvert's phrase, come to grief.

I should certainly have done so if the strangest of accidents had not befallen me.

The day dawned cold as March with gusts of wind and sudden squalls of rain. Furnished with pamphlets and with pies, we set out. The crowds were there before us, waiting quietly outside the Old Exchange for the occasion to begin. A central space, a raised platform in the middle, was roped off from us all. On the platform a brazier of charcoal burned, hissing now and then as heavy drops of rain fell. Beside it, upon a bench, M. Claude's book lay, and beside that the executioner's tongs. A posse of constables, batons in hand, ringed the platform and faced the crowd.

Master Ketch, the executioner, was late. My Lord Mayor who was waiting, watch in hand, cast more than one anxious glance at the purplish-coloured cloud that slanted across the eastern sky. A small hunch-backed man in a cinnamon-coloured coat played softly to us all on a flute. The wind brushed the sound away, then cast it near. Scavenger dogs nosed in the gutters, a child cried, the sun shone for a moment and the citizens' wives in neighbouring houses leaned out of their windows, cushioning plump arms and bosoms upon the broad window frames.

I moved about as freely as I could and sold my pies, but always Mrs Calvert kept me within sight. Bow bells chimed the quarter. In the same moment Master Ketch and his assistant tumbled out of a coach.

At sight of them the crowd turned lively. "Ketch," they shouted, "Ketch, Ketch."

The man with the flute stopped fluting and wiped his mouth. "All that is happening in the way of persecution in France could happen to us, my masters," he piped. "No Popery," he cried again, "no Popery."

A portion of the crowd took up the cry. "No Popery," "No Popery."

Master Ketch showed signs of nervousness. His hands shook. M. Claude's book very properly refused to burn. The flames licked the pages, then died in the wind, the charred fragments flew here

and there, mingling with the torn green leaves.

A quieter voice but one that carried far made itself heard. "Mistress Elizabeth Gaunt of Wapping burned better. Sirs, did she not burn well?"

Batons raised, the constables moved towards the speaker. The crowd responded by drawing closer in. M. Claude's book, thrust into the heart of the brazier, burned at last. The man in the cinnamon-coloured coat beat a soft retreat, fluting like a black-bird all the way.

This was the moment before danger, I knew, when I also should withdraw. Her head turned anxiously in my direction, Mrs Calvert began to move away.

I panicked then. "Let me through, good people," I cried to the press of folk about me. "I pray you, let me through."

I turned myself about, only to halt in fresh alarm. Master Knott, his eyes accusingly on me, was stationed not more than twenty yards away. He was not alone: five or six constables appeared to be in conference with him.

I looked about desperately. Clearly the occasion was over. Master Ketch was pulling a broad-brimmed hat low down over his eyes; my Lord Mayor and the other cloaked and feathered dignitaries were in a flurry to depart.

Moved by the same impulse the crowd pressed forward. Thrust back by the constables, they surged this way, then that like a tide pent up in a narrow place. I clung to my neighbour's arm.

What had I done, he wished to know, breathing a mixture of onions and benevolence in my ear, what had I done that I should be marked down by L'Estrange's man?

"Why, nothing," said I, "except that I do detest him." That Master Knott should be serving his ambition in the pay of Sir Roger L'Estrange, now that I come to consider the matter, did not surprise me. But how to escape him I did not know.

For a little while the weather as well as my kind neighbour came to my aid. The bank of cloud that had been stationary all this while thinned and spread. A fury of wind arose. The mulberry trees in the gardens roundabout tossed and bent again; the sky itself seemed to dissolve in rain. Everyone turned for shelter. My neighbour supporting me still, I was borne along with the rest,

how far I do not know. I could hear the constables crying from some point behind us, "Make way. Make way." I heard nothing else, I could think of nothing else.

My companion who had been working his way towards the edge of the crowd breathed once more in my ear: "Get ready to part."

I was far from understanding him and yet I was most willing to do what he wished.

"Now," said he.

Straightway I was thrust forcibly to my left. A damp passage way received me as if I had been a homeward-hopping toad. I fairly skated in the mud, then fell. On all fours for a moment, I smelled the ground. I can smell it still. Almost at once I was on my feet and running on.

At the end of the passage way I stumbled upon yet one more court, empty except for a small girl child. Clad only in a little shirt that barely reached her thighs, she was blue with cold and so shaken by sobs she seemed past all ordinary crying.

I had been that way too, I thought, in my time.

I grieved for her and yet I ran on. I had my liberty, if not my life, I told myself, to save. And then, for shame, or because the little pitiful image of the child was firmly fixed in my mind's eye, I came hurrying back.

Though I went down on my knees I could in no way comfort her. When I held her to me and wrapped the warm side of my cloak about her she only sobbed the more. From the memory of my own pain I wept too. Strangely, my grief seemed to comfort hers. Eyes washed and blue as periwinkle flowers, she checked her tears and gazed at me.

I looked about me for shelter and caught sight of a padded quilt rolled round like a nest under the carved canopy of an ancient door. I wrapped her in it: it might well have been her own.

The rain had slackened; the sun shone out; the puddles in the gaps between the cobblestones turned darkly blue and a posse of constables emptied into the court and paused, then came on.

For the moment I was past caring what they did. I had moved back in time; I could believe I held my cousin Dinah at this

same age in my arms. In a word, it was like love come again.

I wiped my foundling's eyes; I dried her hair, darkened and matted by the rain. That done, not hurrying at all, the quilt over my arm, I carried her up the four worn steps to the canopied door. It was ajar. I stepped inside. There were many houses of this sort, I knew, waiting for the re-building of London that had been promised for so long, houses that had been plague-infested in their day, that were avoided even now.

By a roundabout route I arrived at last at Mrs Calvert's door.

She appeared thankful to see me, but at sight of the child her look grew troubled and alarmed.

I greeted her gaily, "See what I have found."

She turned away. "I cannot keep her, Mistress Deborah. To my sorrow I have passed by many a one of her lost kind. There are too many of them."

I pleaded with her. "Let me keep her for to-night."

"For to-night then," she said.

While the child slept in my bed, sobbing a little even in her sleep, I could not close my eyes for wondering how I might contrive to keep her for myself and what, if Mrs Calvert would not have her, the child and I might do.

I need not have been afraid. In the morning Mrs Calvert greeted me without preamble as she had done so notably that first time. "I see you are resolved not to part with the child. Then you must work for her. You must earn her keep."

"I will do that," I said. I spoke thankfully.

She hurried on. "I should have told you last night — we must move from here. After what you have told me of Master Knott and his new employment it is only wise."

"When shall we move?" I asked.

"At once," she said, somewhat sharp.

She went on to reproach me for the first time. "I could wish, Mistress Deborah, that you would keep away from the men or that they would keep away from you. If you will not go back to your home in Dorset than you must arrange to be lost or mislaid for a while, you must put on some disguise —"

I interrupted her. "I could wear a smock and breeches. I could turn waggoner's boy."

She shook her head doubtfully, then began to move about the room. "You might go with Joe, the Gloucester carrier," she said at last, halting again. "Though I do not know what the Lieutenant will make of it all."

"I do not know what it is to do with the Lieutenant," I said tartly.

"It would be all to do with him if you were wise," Mrs Calvert said.

She reached for her cloak. "I must find Joe and his cart if we are to leave here."

While collecting my few possessions together and waiting for Mrs Calvert to return I went over this fresh notion of mine again. For a young woman to disguise herself as a man was a trick beloved of romancers everywhere. There was no thought of romance in my mind. I was too vain in petticoats ever to fancy myself in breeches. I had never wished, nor did I wish now, to play the man. To be a woman was a hard enough game for me. But what choice had I? I must separate myself from Mrs Calvert for the present; I must go into some sort of hiding for a while — had she not said so? — until Master Knott and his employer had had time to forget me, or until they could be occupied more profitably elsewhere.

I would travel the roads with Joe, I decided. My spirits rose at the thought. Even the notion of journeying as far towards the West as Gloucester delighted me.

I caught up Melinda Ann Mattravers — for that, we had discovered from her own mouth was her name — and danced a few steps with her down Mrs Calvert's dim and musty-smelling room.

"What caper is this?" Marshall hailed me from the open door.

"She's mine," I said, continuing to whirl, "and three years old, or more. She was born yesterday."

I had thought to silence him. He almost silenced me.

Taking me firmly by the waist, he took charge of the dance. "Where did you find her?"

"In my heart first," said I, for I was unwilling to talk of the child to her face.

"A fig for hearts," he said. "They do always betray a man."

"Always?" I asked. I was never answered for at that moment Mrs Calvert herself came in.

That evening, as soon as the candles began to be lit in the windows of the houses we made our move in Joe's covered cart, Joe at the reins.

Ringed about by our household goods I sat behind Mrs Calvert, Melinda Ann Mattravers upon my knee, a few pamphlets beneath my skirts. I should have trembled, I suppose, at the risks we ran. I did not think of them. My spirits stayed high; the road to the West beckoned, the Thames and the south bank of the river whither we were once more bound seemed marked out for me in the June dusk with streaks of golden light.

2

I AM MARRIED AND LEFT

DURING the next week or so I began, in Mrs Calvert's phrase, to get used to the feel of my legs, untrammelled as they were now by petticoats while I travelled with Joe, the Gloucester carrier, on short trial journeys as waggoner's boy.

Every Tuesday Joe and I would set out from the *Green Dragon* yard in Bishopsgate to some point convenient to us both on the road to the West. At whatever stage we decided upon I would take my leave of him and return alone to Mrs Calvert.

As waggoner's boy I had my duties to perform. I learned to receive parcels and take payment for them; I fed and groomed the horse and harnessed him too. It was for me to keep a house-wifely eye on the outside and inside of Joe's cart, to see that the harness was in trim and the goods stowed. In a white linen smock that reached as far as my knees, in a countryman's hat of grey felt shaped like a cabbage leaf that hid my face, in short breeches that were tucked into high leather boots, a straw as often as not in my mouth, I came and went in the *Green Dragon* yard pretty much as I pleased.

Joe had recently bought a mare called Gentle in place of the old horse I had come to know. I must get used to her he said. Gentle was a gal of sperrit, he declared, and mettlesome. She needed a bit of knowing and a bit of coaxing too, he added with an eye on me, but she'd learn. I could begin to make her acquaintance next Tuesday if I liked.

My pockets stuffed with sugar chips and last year's hazel nuts with which to coax Mistress Gentle, I arrived earlier than usual the following Tuesday morning in the *Green Dragon* yard. To my surprise the mare was already in the shafts. Joe came out of the stables to greet me, waving a lead ladle in which he had apparently been washing himself in one hand. "Hold her firm," he counselled me, "talk to her tender and she'll do."

Do what? I thought nervously.

I held her firm, I talked to her tender. Lips drawn back, she nuzzled and scented me from throat to waist, keeping one purplish-brown eye watchfully upon me all the while. I continued to talk to her but tenderness dried up in me, my palms grew damp, Mare Gentle's teeth quite suddenly seemed over-large.

A door in the gallery of the inn facing me opened and shut, someone came smartly down the stairway that led to the yard. Only at the last moment did I dare to look up. When I did so my eyes met the Lieutenant's eyes. He carried his hat, a grey beaver, all feathered and fine, under one arm. I dropped my gaze; from astonishment I dropped the nuts I was holding in my outstretched palm. He gave me one swift glance as he passed, then turned smartly and came back.

Standing beside me, he fondled the mare. How old was she? he enquired. Was she bred to the shafts? Clapping his hat on his head he leaned nearer. "Mistress Deborah, how is it that I see you here?"

"I might ask the same of you, sir," I said. "Were you not in Amsterdam?"

"Until I came looking for you," he answered. He drew nearer. "You are engaged upon some printer's game, I hear. Let me feed the mare while I talk to you."

I stood to one side, tipping my hat as a waggoner's boy should while the gentleman fed the mare with a fresh handful of nuts.

As I did so the top attic window fronting us opened and a man and a woman leaned out.

"When may I see you? I must see you," the Lieutenant said. "To-night, at half past six of the clock, outside Moll's Chop House by Charing Cross. Come in a hackney coach. Come in petticoats."

He drew off a foot or so, dusting his hands. "My name for the moment is Adams, Lieutenant James Adams. You must marry me, Mistress Deborah. I have decided upon it."

I said, not very firmly, "But I have not."

"To keep you safe," he said in practical tones. "That is all. As yet."

The top attic window creaked and swung wide and was held. The two heads leaned further out.

The Lieutenant made as though to go, then stooped for the nuts I had dropped.

"We are watched. To keep up some sort of pretence wilt let me box your ears?"

From alarm I loosed my hold of Mare Gentle's bridle. From alarm she tossed her head and in doing so knocked the nuts out of the Lieutenant's hand.

"That could not have been bettered," said he and promptly boxed my ears. My hat flew off. "I see that you have cut your hair, Mistress Deborah," he said. "Pray cut nothing else." With that he pushed past me and was gone.

Joe came running out from the stables, half shaven, a fearful razor in one hand. "That was a buffet, that was," he marvelled.

From hurt pride at being cuffed at all and cuffed so hard I could not at first speak. Only when we were trundling down Bishopsgate did I complain.

Joe gave a cautious flick of his whip to Gentle, that other mettlesome gal, before he spoke. "Happen the gentleman did not mean to hit so hard. Happen he felt you owed him summat," he said.

* * *

The Lieutenant was almost as brief in *Moll's Chop House* as he had been in the *Green Dragon* yard. He was a man in a hurry, it

seemed to me, who would not listen or waste words.

I told him with all the conviction I could muster that marrying was quite outside my mind, that even if it were not, I should be very unwilling to consent to a bargain neither of us, when we were able to come together, might wish to keep.

He brushed all that I had to say on one side. "Nevertheless I must marry you," he declared. "To keep you safe, as I have said. And to hold you safe for myself also."

At this point I was driven to interrupt. How was it possible for anyone to protect me, I asked, from as far away as Amsterdam?

"Lean nearer," he said, leaning nearer himself, "lean nearer for fear we are overheard, and I will tell you.

"I cannot protect you from Holland as perfectly as I could wish. That is true. We are at the beginning, as you know well, of a secret and most hazardous enterprise. It is no less than the peaceful invasion of England by the Prince of Orange and a combined Dutch and English army. As a member of that army I am under orders, I am not free to come and go as I please. As a new member — a few months ago I served King James — I am watched and suspect. Even if I were free to come to you, winds and waves in those rough Northern seas would keep us apart. The sea crossing alone may take a week or a fortnight. Our letters, since they can only be conveyed secretly, may take even longer.

"All this is the opposite of what we both desire. But you and I, Mistress Deborah, have not arrived at perfection yet. We have agreed to postpone it for a while. Give me leave to help you meanwhile in all the ways I can. I will list them for you.

"From the moment we are married you may call on my good friend and banker, Edmund Montacute, at the Goldsmith's Company for what sums you need. If you are in trouble you may come to me in Amsterdam by way of Romney Marsh. It is a settled route of escape by this time to Holland and to France. Marshall will tell you more. He is another who will guard you for your own sake and for mine. He and I have been acquainted this long while."

I interrupted a second time. "Did Master Marshall send you to look for me?"

"No-one sent me. Pray listen, Mistress Deborah."

I listened.

"If I die," he continued, "you will inherit all I have. Does that please you?"

"No," I cried. "No." I spoke vehemently. "I cannot take so much and give nothing."

He laughed at that. "Do not let us be too noble. You shall render all that you owe me one day, I promise you."

So our talk went on. Baffled at all points, I became silent. I feared to lose him. And yet how to keep him without marrying him I did not know.

"So it is settled," he said. He held out my cloak and wrapped me in it. That simple gesture, I believe, more than any words silenced me.

"To-morrow then," he said. "Let it be to-morrow." He turned practical and plain. "I will come back with you and speak to Mrs Calvert myself."

In this manner everything was arranged. During the service, which the Reverend Enoch Sampson conducted the next morning at ten of the clock in Bow Church with only two printers and their wives for witnesses, odd irreverent thoughts moved like clockwork mice across the surface of my brain — that I had come a long way only to arrive at this point of departure, that I was fortunate indeed to be so much loved, and that matrimony after all was the properest sort of downfall.

Once outside the church a new sense of happiness invaded me. For his part the Lieutenant appeared greatly pleased. This was his birthday, he declared, the best he had ever known yet, except, of course, the first.

It was my turn to laugh. Was he then, I asked, content?

"Not yet," he answered and slid a hand within my arm.

All that he had to say once more, which disappointed me a little, I confess, had to do with my safety. "If any ill should come to me," he said, "I have recommended you to the care of my cousin, Sir Gervase Sebright. He is a good man, as I hope I am, and a true Christian which I hope I am also. He is a good Catholic besides which I thank God I am not. But there has never been any difference between us on this or on any other matter. He will not fail you."

Was ever a woman blessed with more godfathers? I thought, and was once more thankful.

At this point the stench and noise of the streets, for I had slept little that night, almost overcame me.

"Where are we going to, Master Hobey?" I enquired.

"To Eden, I think," said he, striding on.

"If it please you I would rather go to Fulham," I said, "and sit in the strawberry fields there."

He stopped short and clapped a hand to his brow. "What a fool am I to love you so much and forgot to spare your feet!"

We drove to Fulham. It was just as I had imagined it.

The milkmaids were there in their striped petticoats and hats of plaited Luton straw, the flat fields planted in their ribbons of green stretched away on either side. It was strawberry time. For good measure a country cart and three eight-horse waggons were drawn up round the drinking trough. The milkmaids halted their talk to the waggoners as we came up and gave us good day. There was a smell of horses and of parched summer dust where the water had spilled over from the drinking troughs; the red-and-white cows moved tranquilly over the distant fields, the strawberry beds, striped green and brown like the milkmaids' petticoats, sloped gently away out of sight.

The hour was early yet, the day windless and still, the sun half-veiled. One of the waggoners produced a flute from his pocket, the others together with the carter and the three milkmaids, Sarah and Bathsheba and plump Hannah whom they called Hokey, set to partners. We stood up with them. Together we danced all the country dances that I knew — *Haste to the Wedding* and *Gathering Peasecods* and *Come to the Fair*. Afterwards we shared their meal of bread and country cheese and ripe strawberries. The sun came out. Swinging their pails, the milkmaids bade us goodbye; the waggoners took the road again and my new husband and I, as if this were Eden indeed, sat together in the heat of the day under the same tree.

In the new Spring Gardens at Vauxhall where we went next, I picked pinks and roses — I can smell the scent of them still and feel the prick of the rose thorns. There was music of a sort to be heard also, here a violin, there a Jew's harp or a guitar, none of

which was greatly to our liking. About dusk, therefore, when the lanterns shone out in the walks and the green arbours filled with laughter and whisperings we took boat for Dorset Gardens.

In the new theatre there Master John Abell, the famous tenor of the Chapel Royal, would play upon the lute, or so we understood, and sing songs of Master Dowland's or Master Rossiter's composing. And Signor Francini, the Lieutenant said, would be there also to accompany Master Abell upon the harpsichord. Master Abell's singing, I was assured, ranked above that of any other mortal creature. He would sing two songs everyone loved — In the Silent Night, and Weep ye no more, Sad Fountains.

Master Abell sang these two songs and others also, and it was all nearer Heaven than anything I had heard.

From Dorset Gardens we were rowed back towards midnight to Mrs Calvert's rooms. I remember the cool dip of oars and the milky sheen of Thames water, and the quietness falling everywhere like dew on the grass blades. Most of all I remember the Lieutenant's arms about me and the touch of his lips upon my eyelids and upon my cheeks. From the sense of parting that lay heavily upon us we did not speak. At one moment tears, more foolish than any I had shed yet, since this parting was almost all of my making filled my eyes. And then I called to mind the lessons I had taught myself of late. One must learn not to weep, one must learn to pretend, one must remember never to look back.

Forgetful of everything we journeyed on, then took coach again. Too soon Mrs Calvert's door confronted us. The moment of parting towards which we had been travelling for so long was here. We faced each other.

The Lieutenant took my hands in his. "Will you think of me?"

For answer I clung to him.

He asked me again, more urgently, "Why did you weep?"

"For our parting," I said.

"Then this shall be for our parting also," he said, and now he left me in no doubt that I was loved, and well-loved too.

So he left me for a boat that would slip out, I knew, from Wapping on the tide. I looked after him. As I did so, my will

and even my legs failed me. I leaned against the door.

Mrs Calvert drew back the bolts. Softly, without a word spoken between us, she drew me in.

3

A NEW CONTENTMENT

AS THE days wore on after the Lieutenant's departure a new contentment, born of the assurance that I was loved, possessed me.

It was not constant: it came and went again. I was often homesick. The past with all its cruelties lived for me still. But now I found much to comfort me. I was no longer alone. For the first time since I had left Starvecrow I had friends on whom I could call, friends moreover who were not only willing, but able to help me. Above everything else I had a husband who did indeed appear to desire my company above all things.

I had sometimes been afraid. Now I had less need for fear. If I were hard pressed three ways of escape lay open to me where none had existed before. I had spoken to Marshall, so that now I knew I could in case of need take refuge in Master Hunt's farm on Romney Marsh and lie low there until a certain Captain Gill with his crew of twenty stout fellows in their *owling** boat came to smuggle me away. Or I might apply to a Captain Johnson whom Mrs Calvert knew. His house, always dark and empty-looking, lay next to the *White Lyon* in Broad Street, near Olde Gravel Yard. The Captain, an acknowledged expert in escapes, had bought Frinton Hall in Essex, three miles from Saxmundham and three from Aldeburgh. If I pleased I might rest as quietly there as with Farmer Hunt and his wife on Romney Marsh.

Again, I might take myself to the *Red Cow* at Wapping and seek the help, as the Lieutenant had advised me to do, of Mistress Alice Turner and her husband and, always supposing

*owling = smuggling.

he were to be found, of Captain Gaunt.

Of the three routes that lay open to me the one by way of Wapping and the *Red Cow* attracted me most, I scarcely know why. Some odd compulsion I did not understand appeared to be at work in me. In the light of what followed it was almost as if my own fate, unknown to me, drew me on.

I could do nothing as yet. For the next few months Mrs Calvert's work occupied all my time and most of my waking thoughts.

All over England and in many parts of Scotland also, as the King's illegal acts multiplied, alarm and anger grew. There were riots in Bristol and Edinburgh, in Coventry and Worcester and in London's Cheapside. The Church of England, outraged by the appointment of Roman Catholic bishops to Church of England bishoprics, began at last to preach Protestant doctrines; in the common danger that threatened them both Nonconformist ministers and Anglican divines began for the first time to practise Christian charity towards one another. No section of the King's subjects felt more alarm at the King's excesses than the Roman Catholic minority. Decent, law-abiding folk for the most part, they feared the consequences for themselves of the King's fanaticism. It was said that the Pope of Rome himself had counselled moderation.

But King James would not listen. Booted and spurred, he rode as though blindfold towards what was plainly to be seen as calamity.

While discontent showed openly rebellion moved quietly underground. Never before had there been so great a demand for our pamphlets and news-sheets. Sitting up in bed by candlelight I did my best to understand them. I grieved over the *Dying Speeches* of Colonel Algernon Sidney and my Lord Russell and His Grace of Monmouth. But the Reverend Richard Baxter's *Petition for Peace* and Mr Andrew Marvell's *Appeal from the Country to the City*, both of which we had reprinted recently, lulled me fast asleep.

Perhaps it was enough, I thought, in that queerly lucid moment that comes to us all on waking, if I continued to distribute them at some risk to myself for a wage of five shillings a quarter and my own and Melinda Ann Mattravers' keep.

All this while I was busy in places as far afield as Dover and Norwich, Nottingham and Newbury. There was scarcely a Hiring Fair in the neighbourhood of London which Mrs Calvert and I did not attend. We had friends and a market for our wares everywhere and a small number of Confederates also in every sizable place.

During the late summer and early autumn I met many of them. At Dorking Master Leake had his premises in the back part of an empty saddler's shop in the High Street. From a pastry cook's basement in Hackney James Forbes directed his army of Scots pedlars about their work. Direction was needed since Master Forbes' pedlars moved from alehouse to alehouse only, never selling any printed matter of ours from door to door or in the street.

At Colchester in the County of Essex Mrs Calvert and I had some talk with Master Hickenall, the Town's Baptist Minister. In between preaching the Gospel to secret meetings of his congregation — he was forbidden by law to preach openly — he helped in the distribution of our wares. The week after we visited him he left for the Indies, having been warned beforehand of his own arrest.

Only now when I travelled upon our rounds did I begin to realise the extent of our Confederacy. It was nationwide and included some queerly assorted folk.

I remember some of them. There was Master Lowndes, owner of the large bookshop in the Strand, a vast man with a small white patch of face peeping out from under a blond periwig. There was Nan Maxwell, a woman printer, stouter of body than any woman I had ever seen, balancing not unlike a barrel on a trivet on thin stalks of legs. Susannah More was another bookseller. Dark and ringleted, and a little hump-backed also, she prided herself, good Roundhead though she was, on her likeness to the first King Charles's queen, Henrietta Maria of France.

* * *

Our work had grown but the dangers we were compelled to encounter had grown also. The number of the King's spies had

doubled. Not only publishers and booksellers but constables and magistrates also were watched and spied upon. No two people could stand talking in the street for long without being joined by a third and even a fourth person, eager to report what was said. Every assembly, however small, was considered dangerous; every discussion, however trivial, was suspect.

Clearly a new and more ruthless intelligence was at work on the King's side. The Scots pedlars, of whom I have spoken, as well as the English country carriers who had escaped detection so far received every attention now. Scarcely a week passed during which one or more of them was not thrown into Newgate gaol or the Westminster Gatehouse, or imprisoned in some other place.

The zest we brought to our work was all the greater for the risks we ran. On the whole we thought little of them. The tide of opinion appeared at last to be with us: we could no more draw back than strong swimmers can when a wave of the sea lifts them high and brings them in to shore.

For reasons of this sort I put on one side for the moment any thought I might have had of joining the Lieutenant. It was too soon, I felt, to abandon work I had only just begun.

About this time Joe Preece, the Gloucester carrier, brought me fresh cause for contentment in the shape of a letter from my cousin Dinah. It held little in the way of news yet it brought a gentleness to my thoughts and a sense of belonging I had missed sadly of late.

They were well at Lyme, I gathered, and Dinah was attending the *Academy for Young Ladies* which Mistress Muspratt had opened recently in her house fronting the Cob.

"I can see the Shippes," Dinah wrote. "The Chamber Pott is upon the Staires. I have a Doll from Holland which Captain Julian has given to me. To Receive what you do not Expect is ever Surprising. That you take Care in these Trubblous Times is the Constant Wish of Your Loving Cousin, Dinah Hawkesley."

For a moment I saw her again — the fair head that was a fraction too large, the small firmly-planted feet; I saw her, I say, in my mind's eye and longed for her too. In the next second, as might have been expected, a fresh bout of homesickness assailed me. Though where home was, and if indeed I had a home I could

not have said. True, there was far-off Amsterdam where my husband waited. He had by no means forgotten me. Among other things he sent me gifts of flowers, part frozen and most marvellously preserved, that bloomed and came alive in the warmth.

I also might recover, he wrote, from too much remembrance of what was past if I would come to him.

But still I felt that I had work, not unconnected with those remembrances, to do, that I was not ready in my mind yet for so much happiness. Nevertheless I thought of him constantly. In doing so I could not help but remember a hundred times the great care he had taken of me ever since we met, and the many arrangements he had made at the time of our marriage and before that for my safety.

All this in mind, I resolved more positively than I had resolved yet that I would visit Wapping at the first opportunity and seek out Mistress Alice and Captain Gaunt so that I might know beforehand all there was to be learned of this way of escape.

4

A MEETING OF STRANGERS

NOT until February, when the stems of the willows were reddening by the riverside and people went out shooting duck on Hackney Marshes and Sir Christopher Wren began to go up and down in a bucket once more to oversee the final stages in the building of the new St. Paul's — not until then was I free to go, with Mrs Calvert's consent, to Wapping.

I had no difficulty in finding *The Red Cow*, a small white-plastered inn facing the waterfront.

Over a mug of ale and a portion of bread and cheese I made myself known to Mistress Alice Turner. She received me kindly. When I enquired, as the Lieutenant had instructed me to do, if the

Hiltje was in yet from Amsterdam she answered smilingly that the *Hiltje* was not expected yet. While she spoke her eyes, round and smiling and clear, did not leave my face.

I came several times to *The Red Cow* after that, as our work dictated and Mrs Calvert wished. Though I became acquainted with a number of Wapping folk and liked them well, not once did I set eyes on Mistress Alice's husband or on Captain Gaunt.

And then one day, my noonday meal of bread and cheese eaten, the door of Mistress Alice's parlour opened suddenly. A stranger to me, a sea captain by the look of him, had one hand on the latch. His canvas jacket was wet. Though the day was fine his sea boots made wet prints on the stone floor. Dark-haired and dark-complexioned, with hard choleric blue eyes, he stared at me.

Was I Mistress Deborah Hawkesley? he asked at last.

Standing up, I answered him. "Mistress Turner will tell you who I am. I think you must be Captain Gaunt."

"The name is Gaunt." He bowed stiffly, then he was gone.

I was disappointed, I own, and somewhat vexed also that he should depart so abruptly. Why seek me out, I thought, if he had nothing to say?

I spoke to Mistress Alice. Was the *Hiltje* expected again before long?

"Perhaps in three weeks," she said, nodding. "Yes, I should think three weeks."

Some three weeks later, though I had intended nothing of the kind, it happened that I was once more at the inn.

Except for a young Dutchman seated in the window of the inn parlour it appeared empty. His back towards me, a woollen cap such as seamen wear pulled down low over his ears, he was stroking Mistress Alice's lean tortoiseshell cat. He jumped to his feet as I came in and the cat slipped from his lap and slithered a foot or two on the polished floor.

Dragging off his woollen cap, my cousin John faced me.

We had not met since that night when Oliver was captured and one boat, and one boat only, John on board her, got away. It was well over a year ago and yet from the many memories that were fresh in my mind still, that crowded in on me as I looked

at him I could not speak.

John challenged me at once. "Are you glad to see me or not?"

"I have never wished you any harm," I said.

He took one step towards me. "Then you bear me no grudge?"

"I cannot forgive you," I said, "if that is what you mean."

"I took what Oliver offered," he declared. "I did not ask him to give up his place to me. He was finished, I tell you. He had no wish to go on."

"These moments of weakness never lasted with him," I said.

"You cannot know," John said. "You did not listen to him, as I did, night after night when we lay hid on the moor."

I cut him short. "Why have you come? Was it to stir up more strife? Or do you only wish to comfort yourself?"

"Do you think," he said, "that I have no feeling and no regrets? That I have not thought of you, and of my mother?" He half turned away. "You are in need of nothing?"

"Nothing." I shook my head. "And you?"

"Of peace," he said. "Of peace most of all."

He suffered, I thought. From compassion I drew nearer him.

"It will come," I said.

"When?" he asked.

"It piles up, unnoticed," I answered. "Then, suddenly, it is there."

How it happened I do not know, but for a moment we clung together as we had not done for years. And then John freed himself as I had known he would. And I, too, drew back.

It was like a meeting of strangers once more. John was as far from forgiving me, I realised, as I was from forgiving him.

Head bent, he began to draw his seaman's cap on again, pulling it low down over his ears with both hands. I watched him with an odd ache at my heart, for I had seen him go through these same motions scores of times.

What had become of my uncle's goods and the Hawkesley house at Lyme? he wished to know.

"Mayor Alford has them," I said.

"He will not have them long if I can help it." John spoke with so much passion suddenly that Mistress Alice put her

head round the door, then withdrew again.

"So you have turned political?" I said.

He flushed. "I want what is mine. That is all."

He stooped to pick up his sailor's bundle in the red knotted handkerchief.

"Do not hold Oliver's capture against me, Deborah," he said, straightening. "He sought his own death. I think he wished for it also. He looked for perfection always. When he did not find it he lost heart. Except for the courage we brought to it the campaign seemed to him one long piece of futility. While some of us could forgive the Duke's flight with my Lord Grey from the Battle he could not. Their betrayal — that is what it seemed to him — cut deep. Only by continued suffering and sacrifice on our part he believed could we wipe out the shame they had brought upon us, and our own defeat."

"So he died," I said. "And you went free."

"Where did you learn," John asked, "so much bitterness?"

"In Taunton," I said, "and in Lyme. And at Starvecrow."

"You had a child, I think," he said. "And it died?"

"I miscarried of it," I said.

"I've a ship of my own," he said, his head turned away, "and a wife, and a child that will soon be born."

So much, I thought. "You always wanted a ship of your own," I said.

"I wanted all three," he said.

"And now you have them," I said, "all three." From the pain I felt I cried out to him again, "Why must Oliver give up his place to you? Why? Could he not think of me?"

"Have I not told you he had a passion for giving?" John said.

"As some men have for taking," I answered.

John turned on me. "Did he not take you?"

So the old anger flared up between us and we parted. There was no forgiveness between us and no peace. John went off to his ship and his wife and his unborn child. I watched him go, out of Mistress Alice's back door, past the privy, its door swinging wide, over the cobblestones, to the *Hiltje's* boat.

Had he not done well? I thought. Was he not comforted?

For a moment I stayed where I was. Then I, too, moved on,

my tray held before me, decked with the laces and ribbons and the pamphlets under them that I had still to sell.

5

SUKEY AND THE CORPORAL

MY encounter with John left me with an occasional heaviness of mood that was not easily dispelled. I had not expected to meet him nor even wished to do so and yet I could not help but regret the way in which our encounter had gone.

On this particular Saturday I was alone. Melinda Ann Mattravers who might have entertained me was lodged happily for the day with Mrs Curtis, another printer's widow; Mrs Calvert was absent upon some errand of her own.

Flattening my nose against our one small window-pane and looking out upon a dark Southwark wall (we had moved back to Southwark), I wished I might be away and out of the house, I wished I might forget myself for a while.

I moved aimlessly into the centre of the room then back to the window again and Marshall, a half smile about his lips, came in.

One eyebrow raised to serve for question mark, he looked at me.

"Wilt leave off flattening that nose of yours and come to Hounslow with me?"

"Yes," said I. "Yes to both." I leapt eagerly to my feet and my spirits shot up also.

A trip to Hounslow at this moment was all that I could desire. There would be drums and trumpets to be heard, boxing and wrestling matches to be witnessed, fine horses to be fed, company of all sorts to be quizzed and admired — or so I had always understood. After so much sightseeing there would be refreshments to be bought at any of the booths which had sprung up outside the camp. There would be ale and perry and cider to be drunk, cakes and sherry syllabubs and chicken pies to be eaten

most pleasantly upon the grass. There would be the pleasure of setting out and the even greater pleasure, all the sights of the day stored up in my mind, of journeying home again.

About twelve noon we set out. In Thames Street a tidy rumble Marshall had hired for the day was waiting. Away we sped behind a trotting chestnut-coloured horse to Hyde Park and Kensington village, then on again at last to Hounslow by way of Gunnersbury and Brentford.

Already half London seemed abroad. From Hyde Park Corner to Kensington Village the road was gay with a myriad painted wheels. There were tidy rumbles like our own and hackney coaches and country carts, all crowding together, all loaded to the brim. Numbers of the larger and sturdier sorts of coaches were to be seen, conspicuous as elephants at a Fair. Wisps of tobacco smoke issued from their windows, some comfortable London merchant, knees spread wide, within. Ladies of Convenience, their heads nodding like tired poppies, looked out from the small shabby-gilt windows of hired chairs; respectable citizens' wives passed them, riding pillion; young lovers filled the footways, stepping out two by two and often hand-in-hand.

It was a pilgrimage indeed. The branches of the trees lifted and swayed, the flowers in the gardens along the way — gilliflowers and daffodils and coloured bells — touched together, then parted as though in the first figure of a dance. There was a smell of horse dung, to be sure, and of spring dust, but the stench of London was left far behind.

The nearer we came to the camp the thicker the throng of people grew. Not only Londoners proper but the inhabitants of the suburbs also were astir. King James had thought to terrify Londoners into submission with his fourteen battalions of foot soldiers, his thirty-two squadrons of cavalry and twenty-six pieces of artillery, all gathered together within easy reach of the capital at Hounslow Camp. He had failed. All that he had succeeded in doing was to provide Londoners with a spectacle they had never before witnessed and an entertainment of which, it appeared, they could not tire.

They had flocked to Hounslow out of curiosity at first. Curiosity had given way to affection and admiration mixed. Pity

for the men's hard lot had been added. "Poor fellows," everyone said, "what was to be done with them, so far from home?"

A great deal was done for them in invitations given and accepted, in love at first sight and even at second sight, in betrothals and baptisms and bigamies, and even in wedding bells.

I had heard all this: I was anxious to see it for myself.

* * *

Close on one o'clock Marshall laid a hand on my knee. "Here is Hounslow."

The Camp, clearly visible by this time, showed like a mass of small white mountain peaks in a wide plain of green. The air blew fresher, the traffic slowed to a walking pace as the road climbed higher.

In excitement I caught at Marshall's arm. "I wish I might shout or wave."

He answered me soberly. "I wish you might always feel as joyful as you do now when you come here."

I was silent for a moment and then I said, "Do you mean that I shall be coming again to Hounslow on Mrs Calvert's affairs?"

"If she has her way and if you are willing," he said.

For fear of being overheard by passengers in the other vehicles bowling along beside us we said no more.

Marshall let his words sink in; I pondered them, and that was all. It was not difficult for me to understand what was in his mind. To sell unlicensed printed matter to the King's soldiers within Hounslow Camp might well rank as sedition. To sell the same printed matter outside the Camp to ordinary citizens was an infinitely smaller affair. If I were found guilty of sedition I might be hanged; if I were suspected of sedition I might be sentenced to transportation to the colonies for as long as fourteen years or for life. Neither prospect delighted me. For a second, by no means for the first time, I was aware of the sharp edge of fear though I was not yet afraid. I was younger and vainer than most. When I considered my own case it seemed to me that a sentence of hanging or imprisonment or transportation could never be passed upon me. It could be passed upon other men and women, yes,

but never, I was convinced, upon me. I let my thoughts drift along. They did so fairly comfortably. I had come to Hounslow to enjoy myself and enjoyment was here: nothing, I was determined, should cheat me of it.

After the least possible confusion and delay Marshall and I found ourselves among the throng of visitors strolling arm-in-arm down the long lanes of the tents.

The soldiers, magnificent in their scarlet coats with the coloured facings, in their white buckskin breeches, in tall hats of cloth shaped like bishops' mitres, were everywhere to be seen greeting their visitors or being hailed by them, or standing about in groups and looking on. Scarcely a young woman went unaccompanied; there was not a family gathering to be seen which did not include some member of the King's forces.

The Camp was like a Country Fair for bustle and noise and men and women crowding everywhere. Against a background of bugle notes and drum beats and the distant tramp of feet the refreshment sellers cried their wares — Worcestershire Perry, Hereford Cider, Orange Sherbet, London Ale, Pig's Puddings, Pork Sausages, Meat Pies. A showman in tight black breeches swung a rattle outside a boxing booth and invited us in — "Step inside, ladies and gents, step in . . ."

We paused, and a little black drummer boy, a small gold-braided hat over one ear, came in sight bolting from side to side as he ran. A long Corporal of Foot, cane in hand, coursed after him, stumbling over every tussock of grass in his stiff top boots and cursing and laughing as he came.

We stood on one side. As we did so Marshall took his hand from my arm. "Damnation," said he.

"Why?" said I.

"I had not reckoned," he said, "on our meeting Mother Hall."

"Mother Hall?" I looked about me. I knew nothing of Mother Hall.

He turned impatient. "Over there. By the donkeys."

The sutleress, for that is what I supposed her to be, sat before an open booth filled with barrels. A wolf hound kept guard beside her; two donkeys, empty panniers balancing on either side, cropped the grass a few feet away. A Notice outside a small tent

caught my gaze. "Mother Hall, the Soldiers' Free Mistress," it said.

While I struggled with the distaste I could not help but feel the lady herself, big and bosomy, in a hat of yellow Dunstable straw wreathed with innocent-looking flowers, in a russet-coloured gown looped over a flaunting yellow petticoat, came picking her way towards us as delicately as a cat over the long grass.

She greeted Matshall at once, familiarly. "What have you been doing with yourself this long while, Master Marshall? It's two years, I reckon, since you left Holland with His Grace of Monmouth?"

"About that." Marshall smiled.

"Well, how are things?" she asked. "How blows the wind these days?"

"Turning our way," he said.

"That is what you think," she answered, somewhat tart. Her eyes narrowed. "So you are at your old game of king-making still?"

"Until it is finished," he said.

"Or it finishes you?"

He laughed. "Are you warning me?"

"I wouldn't dare." She sighed, sudden and sharp. "Who's your lady?"

"Lieutenant Adams' wife," Marshall said.

Adams, I was obliged to remind myself, was the name the Lieutenant had taken when he stayed at the *Green Dragon Inn*.

So I was to go under a false name at Hounslow Camp! Neither then, nor afterwards, did the thought please me.

Mother Hall's eyes, so dark a hazel as to appear almost black, scanned my face. "Where's he?"

My husband was abroad, I said.

"Where?" she persisted.

"In Holland," I answered, somewhat annoyed.

"It's always Holland," she said. "You would think there was never any other place. Master Marshall and I met there, mistress, at the storming of the fort at Maastricht when he helped me look for my husband, Sergeant Hall, among the dead." She appealed to Marshall. "That's right, isn't it, Master Marshall?"

"It's an old story now," he said.

"But true," she said. Once more she addressed me. "We've been friends this long while, Master Marshall and me. I am one that serves my friends, them that are my friends." She paused for a second. "I serve them all ways, mistress. But you've noticed that." She made as though to go, then halted. "Leave your lady and share a drink with me, Master Marshall, before you go, for old times' sake."

"I will," he said.

"Then I'll know," she finished, "what you are doing here with Lieutenant Adams' wife."

She mocked us both, I thought. I looked after her as she moved away. What company was this, I asked myself, that I must keep?

Intuitive as a cat she turned. She shot out a tongue. "Best join your husband, mistress," she said.

Some insult was intended, I felt — precisely what I did not know. I spoke quickly when she was out of hearing though my cheeks burned. "So Mother Hall and you were friends."

"Yes." Marshall moved. "I must go find her, I think, to keep her sweet."

"Have I offended her then?" I asked.

"She has her pride," he said. "You showed her yours."

"So I have done wrong," I said.

"Why no." He half-smiled. "I was not scolding you."

"But you must keep her sweet?"

"If you are to be safe at Hounslow I must." He put out a hand. "I'll go now."

The boxing booth filled. The refreshment sellers moved on. I stayed where I was, as unaware of my surroundings as a parcel left for the carrier's cart to pick up at a wayside inn. It seemed clear to me as I stood there that if Mother Hall was ever in the mood to betray anyone she would betray me. We had disliked each other at first sight, we had disapproved of each other also. That vice, or what the world called vice should disapprove of virtue (I thought myself virtuous), was new to me, yet it did not appear strange. Our dislike of each other could lead to fresh difficulties, I realised sharply, even, where I was concerned, to fresh dangers. And all this at a time when I had turned my back upon safety.

I leaned sideways to the wind that was blowing briskly down the long avenue of tents and was conscious of a spurt of ill-humour as I did so. Why was Marshall so long in coming? Why must I wait? And be told nothing?

I moved impatiently. As I did so a voice from a neighbouring tent hailed me. "Hold on. Wait a bit."

I held on. I waited a bit while the same Corporal (unless I was mistaken), who had chased the drummer boy an hour ago came creaking splendidly towards me in his tight buckskin breeches. His scarlet coat was brilliant in the sun; the braid on his guardsman's tall cap — he had been bareheaded before — glittered and shone.

"Your feller's left you." He jerked a finger towards Mother Hall's booth. "I see him go. And my Sukey ain't here yet either." He paused invitingly.

"They'll come." I was brief.

"Pity." He grinned. "Pity a feller can't be in two places at once, I mean, or with two folks at once."

"Leave things as they are." I advised him. "They are troublesome enough as it is."

He turned sympathetic at once. "You feel like that? Ah, I see you do." He came nearer.

Was he married to Mrs Sukey? I asked hastily.

"That's my trouble," he said, halting as I had hoped he would. "I haven't quite brought myself round that far yet. It's a fair bleeder," he declared, "a fair corker, I should say, begging your pardon, ma'am, knowing just what to do."

"You must marry your Sukey," I said. "Of course you must."

"Women always know, don't they?" he asked, somewhat sly. He looked about him. "If they don't, neither of 'em, turn up, neither your feller nor my girl, there would be no harm, would there . . . ?" Once more he paused.

"Harm in what?" said I, somewhat short.

"No harm in you and me keeping company?" He grinned again.

"No harm and no profit either," I declared.

He tapped his right leg thoughtfully with his short silver-knobbed cane.

"I reckon I see your feller coming," he said. "And that's my Sukey hurrying along on the right. Sukey's always late."

A young woman in a blue gown looped over a red petticoat was indeed bearing down purposefully upon us, a child of perhaps eighteen months old poised arrogantly in the crook of one arm.

"Why, Sukey," the Corporal greeted her, arms flung wide, "I've been a-waiting for you this long half hour, my dear."

"I see you have, you false thing-g," Sukey answered, sounding her g's twice over and breathing deep. "You can't be left alone five blessed minutes, and that's the truth."

"Why, Sukey," the Corporal protested in injured tones, "why . . ."

Sukey appealed to me. "He would have been off with you, wouldn't he, if I hadn't have come? If you would have let him, that is."

"I wouldn't," I said.

She was brown as a hazel nut with tawny shades in her hair and pale cloudy-blue eyes under dark pencilled brows.

The child moved in her arms.

As though some sort of wonder were at work in him for an instant the Corporal touched the boy's face.

"He's mine," he declared. "Ain't he, Suke?"

"Worse luck. For him," Sukey said, angry tears in her eyes.

"Why, Sukey," the Corporal began again, "why . . ." as Marshall, taking his time about it, drew near.

"Here is Master Marshall. I was waiting for him, Mrs Sukey," I said, very plain.

"The lady is Lieutenant Adams' wife," Marshall made Mrs Sukey a small stiff bow as he spoke.

"And this is Sukey, Mrs Sukey Maggot from *The Brave Fisherboy* at Whitstable where the oysters come from," the Corporal said.

Sukey dropped a small curtsy. "Pleased, I'm sure," she declared, looking from one to the other of them, and not sure at all.

"You can call me Jimmy," the Corporal said. "Christened Andrew James."

"His proper name's Rich, but he ain't rich," Sukey said, trying to smile. "Ninepence a day and everything took off – that's what you get in the Army – don't get you far."

"There you're wrong, my dear," the Corporal responded cheerfully. "It gets you further than any other road. Jamaica one time, the Low Countries the next, Virginny after that. You can't beat it."

"But it don't bring you back," Sukey said, "and it'll leave you nothing in the end."

Once more she turned to me. "I do wish the Corporal would go all ordinary like other men and keep a nice little public somewhere or something. I don't know why he ever joined the Army. Honest, I don't. Unless it was to get out of something else."

"That was it, my dear," said the Corporal, winking at Marshall as he spoke. "Don't you worry about that, Suke," he said, taking her arm. "'Tis all over now and you and me are to be married a-Sunday."

"I know your sort o'promises," Sukey said fiercely, disengaging her arm. "Like piecrust they are." Once more she looked at me. "He's been going to marry me every Sunday this twelve-month and more. I got no sort of faith in him now."

"The christening first and the wedding afterwards, that's the way," the Corporal said.

"It did ought to be the other way round, and you know it," Sukey declared. "Didn't it?" She appealed to me.

I touched the child's cheek. "What will you call him, Mrs Sukey? Will you call him James?"

"William," the Corporal said. "No more James for me."

"William for me too," I said. "One day." When? I thought, suddenly and only too accountably depressed.

"A glass of wine all round at Mother Hall's. Why not?" Marshall spoke quickly.

"Mother Hall's again," I said and tried to laugh.

Marshall and the Corporal leading, Sukey and I followed.

"You are married and you're not expecting," Sukey marvelled. "But you will be," she said, "see if you are not, when he comes back." She hoisted the child higher in her arms when I did not speak. "Overseas, did you say he was? I do hope he's not in

Jamaica or in one of them parts. 'Tis cruel there with fevers and plagues. Hardly a man that goes there ever comes back."

I said, "I hope he comes back." I had returned him to danger, I thought, I had given him nothing; what if he never came back?

"Hold young William, won't you?" Sukey thrust the child at me. "He's a good boy and real loving like his Dad if you don't bother him too much. You're fretting, Mistress Adams," she said. "I can see you are. Well, don't. Once you begin a family you can't hardly stop. I'm sure I don't want to go on having children, but what with the Corporal for ever coming and going, such a flitter-bug as he is, and artful as a box of monkeys too, and me so fond of him I don't hardly know how to say No. I wouldn't worry, truly I wouldn't, if I was you."

"I don't think I was worrying," I said.

Seated on a bench which Mother Hall obligingly supplied we drank our wine.

"To absent friends." Sukey raised her glass.

To them all, I thought. We drank to them. For a moment I remembered my own child again; for an instant I saw Oliver's face.

"To our next meeting," Marshall said.

We drank that toast also.

The child turned sleepily in my arms; I spilled my wine.

"Give him to me." Sukey leaned forward hungrily.

I parted from young William. All at once, for the child had been heavy and warm in my arms, the air seemed cold. I drew my cloak, the same blue cloak that had been with me for so long, about me; the Corporal stretched out his long legs and swore that he must go and made no move. I talked and laughed too much. Marshall stayed silent. More wine was brought; the occasion, after having dragged on too long, came abruptly to an end. We said goodbye.

Over the head of young William, Sukey as one woman to another, kissed me suddenly.

When we were alone once more Marshall said what I expected him to say. "This life is no longer any life for you. You know that."

"Sometimes," I said.

He moved the empty bottle that stood between us to one side. Did I expect him, he asked, to go on protecting me?

"If you please." I spoke meekly.

God forgive him, he declared, if I did not want everything.

"Why should I not want everything," I asked, "seeing that I have so little?"

"If you wished," he said, "you could have everything."

"If I knew what I wished," I answered. But I did not know, I thought. Or perhaps I wanted too much

We moved on. Closer than usual Marshall held my arm.

We admired the march past of the Foot Guards; we fed the Dragoons' horses and the sparrows; we listened to two negro trumpeters and shared a chicken pie on the grass. And all the while, for which I was most grateful, Marshall said not one word more of what was in his mind and in my mind also, of Holland and the new dangers I must run if I continued with Mrs Calvert's work at Hounslow Camp.

6

A CHAIN OF EVENTS

I MUST write now of a chain of events, some small, some not so small, all of them of the utmost importance to the tale I have to tell.

After more preparations had been made and some precautions taken of which I was unaware at first, I did indeed go to Hounslow Camp on Mrs Calvert's affairs. There I was fortunate enough to see something of the Corporal and a great deal of Sukey.

My work was not nearly as dangerous or as unpleasant at first as I had feared. Mother Hall did not appear to be hostile. I had in fact little contact with her, Marshall having arranged matters after this fashion. No money passed between us until the very end and no messages. Though I knew she was paid for her

secrecy where our work was concerned I never learned what sums she received. According to the rules of our Confederacy all this was kept from me.

For my own part I never spoke of the real purpose of my coming to Hounslow to Sukey or to the Corporal. So many vendors of so many different sorts of wares frequented the Camp it was not difficult to go unnoticed. I went all the more happily at first since Mrs Calvert had expressly forbidden me to sell any printed matter within the Camp. My instructions, which I observed, were to dispose of them outside to certain accredited persons only.

I continued in spite of appearances to be wary of Mother Hall. She alone knew the purpose of my visits: it was well within her power to betray me if she wished. While her old acquaintance with Marshall continued I might go safe, I felt. If that were broken I could count upon nothing.

For the moment her only weapon where I was concerned was silence. It was silence punctuated by hard cold stares. I would wonder sometimes, for I forgot affronts easily, why she should continue to dislike me so much. I had despised her too openly at first sight and that perhaps was something she could not forgive. But I had been civil ever since; I had done her no other harm. I would wonder sometimes, as I have said, why she could not be civil to me. And then, like a shadow under a closed door, all thought of Mother Hall would slip out of my mind.

I took an affectionate interest in Sukey's affairs. To our great pleasure and satisfaction she and I would often meet at Hounslow. When the weather was fine we would share a rhubarb sherbet or a pint of ale at Mother Hall's booth. As often as not I would have Melinda Ann Mattravers with me while Sukey, who was expecting again, would have Master William, unchristened yet, lusty and demanding as ever upon her knee.

Our talk would range comfortably over a number of small matters. We would compare notes, for instance, as to where the stoutest stay laces were to be had and whether morning dew or a paste of boiled lettuce leaves was better for a sun-burned face. It was on one of these occasions that Sukey revealed her passion, so almost fatal to us both, for a silk petticoat.

"I'll have it pink," she declared, "for if ever I do walk up a church aisle with the Corporal I can't, seeing as I have got young William here, be seen in white. I would like it to be of silk, just to have that lovely rustle going before me up the stairs and falling away after me when I come down." She sighed. "But I'll never have my wish. And I don't reckon I shall ever go up a church aisle with the Corporal neither. For he don't ever talk of marrying me come Sunday now like he used to do. He don't talk of marrying me at all these days."

For a moment she hugged a protesting William to her and was silent.

"I don't know," she went on, lifting the child in her arms and settling him down more comfortably again, "I'm sure I don't know why I go on with the Corporal as I do. I declare I get so mad with him sometimes I'd *like* to leave him. But then he has only got to hold out his little finger to me — for that is what he does — and I can't be vexed with him a minute longer."

"I don't think I should ever be quite so forgiving," I said.

"It's best my way," Sukey declared. "I reckon no good comes to a woman through being hard. And not much good through being soft neither."

Here she hoisted young William in her arms again and laughed — Sukey would always laugh if she could — and Mother Hall came out of her booth and stared and went in again.

I stood up. As I did so I remembered the silk petticoat which I had worn under my turquoise gown on my nameday.

"I'll give you my silk petticoat, Sukey," I said. "Will yellow do?"

"I would rather have pink." Standing up in her turn, Sukey smoothed her gown. "If you don't mind."

I laughed at her. "I don't mind."

Privately I resolved to bring my yellow petticoat to Hounslow at the first opportunity. But the opportunity never came. For a few weeks Sukey and I did not meet. During that time, in order that I should not be seen too frequently at Hounslow Mrs Calvert sent me for my own safety further afield, to the West once more and then to the Midlands and Bedfordshire.

Wherever my travels took me the talk was all of Queen Mary

of Modena's visit to Bath to take the waters there and of her hopes of the new pregnancy that might follow from taking the waters, and of the cold welcome King James was receiving everywhere during his separate visit to the West.

From Bristol I journeyed to the Midlands and Bedfordshire. In both places all the talk had been not of Queen Mary of Modena and the Bath waters, but of King James and his attempt to win the Nonconformists, whom he had never ceased to persecute until this moment, to his side. In the hope of pleasing them he had released the Reverend Richard Baxter, Kidderminster's famous divine, from gaol and Master John Bunyan himself. The Reverend Richard Baxter had already suffered imprisonment for three years while Master Bunyan, as everyone knows, had suffered in Bedford gaol for twelve.

So sudden a change of policy on the King's part deceived no-one. It was one more step, people were convinced, in the same direction, part and parcel of the plan, so dear to the King's heart, of replacing the Church of England by the Church of Rome. Only with the support of the Nonconformists could the plan succeed. The King's offer, which was made about this time, of religious toleration and freedom of worship for Nonconformists was scoffed at. It was no more than a carrot to catch donkeys, people said. The Church of Rome had never yet been tolerant. No, nor had King James.

The Nonconformist ministers who were released from gaol were not won over. They continued, quite unrepentantly, to preach Parliamentary freedoms and Protestant doctrines.

At Barton-in-the-Clay Master John Bunyan himself, disguised in a carter's smock and carrying a whip, testified most plainly to both in a flat field beside a wood. All the neighbourhood, though he was forbidden to preach, flocked to hear him. I was present also with a few copies — all that we had at this time — of Master Bunyan's works which I hoped to sell.

From Barton-in-the-Clay I proceeded to Alcester and Evesham and Worcester. Near Alcester, that ancient town of needlemakers and tavern keepers, by Amen Corner near the village of Dunnington I heard the Reverend Richard Baxter preach on conscience and liberty. Afterwards I sold copies of his *Paraphrase*

of the New Testament, the publication of which had also been forbidden by King James, to those members of his congregation who asked for them.

In August I returned to Mrs Calvert, my mind full of all that I had seen and heard.

On the day following my return which was a Saturday, she suggested that I should come with her to Rotherhithe. We would hire a wherry, she said, and a waterman. It would be something of a holiday for me and a rest also. Once at Rotherhithe I might do as I pleased until she joined me again. If I wished I might take Melinda Ann Mattravers with me. But if I did so we must buy her a hat of Luton straw to keep the sun from the back of her neck and her eyes.

All this we did very happily. About twelve noon we were on board the wherry. I had Mrs Calvert by my side, Melinda Ann, almost obscured by the hat and fingering it all the while, upon my knee. My thoughts moved smoothly to the dip of the waterman's oars. I remembered the quiet Midland streams I had walked beside in June and the white cups of the water lilies and the faint splash of the moorhen's feet in the shallows.

Other boats moved past us. I scarcely noticed them. I leaned my chin on Melinda Ann Mattravers' head; the day held its own peace; I believed myself safe. For the moment nothing troubled me.

Our waterman changed course a little. I felt Mrs Calvert stiffen as though for danger at my side. I looked up. Seated in a small fine barge bearing down upon us Sir Roger L'Estrange faced me. Arms folded, he stared ahead. The same could not be remarked of his companion, my old enemy, Master Knott. Seated beside Sir Roger he leaned forward, recognition and a passion of resentment darkening his face.

Mrs Calvert, who had been quick to recognise Master Knott and his employer, appeared unusually alarmed.

"It is the greatest misfortune that could have befallen you at this time, Mistress Deborah," she declared. "That you should encounter these two men when I hoped you were in a fair way to being forgotten by them."

I answered her stoutly. "It is one more mischance, that is all."

As so often I pretended an indifference I did not feel.

From this time onwards I did everything I could within reason to preserve myself. I had moved, I knew, into more perilous country. But events were against me.

In October it was announced that Queen Mary of Modena was pregnant.

No news could have been more unwelcome to the great majority of King James' subjects. The Protestant succession to the throne of the King's nephew, Prince William of Orange, and his wife, Princess Mary of England, was now in danger. The birth of a son, the Catholic heir the King wished for so ardently, could not be ruled out nor the fearful clash between King and people on the grounds of religion and liberty that must follow.

It was only to be expected that my husband should write to me from Amsterdam on a fresh note of alarm.

He was, he said, my faithful friend and humble servant and would continue to be so while his life lasted. Above all things he desired my happiness and safety. So much, he reminded me, could not help but be well-known to me since he had made me similar protestations, all of them from his heart, a score of times. (This, I do believe, was an exaggeration.)

He was of a patient disposition, he went on, and he thanked God for it, since patience on his part where I was concerned was clearly necessary. He had been uncomplaining so far. But now, from thinking of me and reflecting upon the dangers that threatened he could no longer bear a solitary pillow.

Seated at Mrs Calvert's round table, I bit through my quill pen in the effort I made to answer him. But first I sought deep in my mind for my own fears, for those which he knew and for those others I had not spoken of as yet.

I was grateful for his patience, I wrote, and thanked him for it. I assured him I was, and always would be, his faithful friend and loving servant as he was mine.

I wished, I said, that he should have less cause for patience in the future where I was concerned and no cause to complain. To speak plainly, I wrote, I was determined to deny him nothing that love or loving kindness could give. It was not unwillingness, I declared, that had held me back from joining him so

far. Rather it was a number of small recurring fears.

There was not only the difficulty I felt in cutting short my work for Mrs Calvert at this time; there was also the misgiving I could not help but feel on his account which I had never mentioned where Melinda Ann Mattravers was concerned. What right had I, I could not help but ask myself now, to burden him with a child that was not his nor even mine? I was visited by other fears also. He knew nothing, I said, of my true character — how changeable I was and yet how self-willed. He and I could do a great deal together, I did not doubt, provided I were as obedient as a wife should be.

But I had never found it easy to be obedient. Of late years I had gone my own way, as he knew well, most obstinately. I did not for the life of me know, I said, how he would bear with me before I could settle down to be a wife, nor how it was possible for me to change back as I often wished I might into the young woman I had once been. For I had been obliged, I reminded him, to travel a hard way, one I feared that had left its mark on me.

I begged that he would ponder these matters a little and that he would not think me foolish to write as I did. Truly, I said, I wrote only from my heart.

Having read my letter through twice and altered nothing I sealed it and entrusted it to Mistress Alice of *The Red Cow* for conveyance to the Lieutenant by way of Captain Gaunt or by way of some other reliable skipper bound for Amsterdam.

In a fortnight's time my husband, by way of Marshall, answered me most kindly.

He was glad of my letter, he said, and thanked me for it. He would have me know that all he had to say in answer came from his heart also.

"As to the child," he went on, "have I not said — indeed I believe I must at some time have done so — that everything shall be as you wish? Do I not love you? How then could it be otherwise with me where she is concerned?

"You speak," he continued, "of your work for Mrs Calvert. What more at this stage can you do?

"Now let us come," he said, "to those alarms of yours. I have."

mine also.

"I am ignorant of your true character, you say. It is very likely, I think, that you are ignorant of mine. I will say no more. Are we not all strangers and solitaires? For this solitaryness matrimony is, I do believe, the best remedy. By patience and kindness and much loving and laughter above all you and I may wear through to something like perfection yet. I do believe it. As for obedience between you and me I think no more of it than I do of cold porridge.

"So let us start off together as soon as may be. It will be the best journey of all. Within ten days or less, if we are as bold as we are loving, we shall laugh at each other and all our fears."

While I waited, silenced at last but unable from the difficulties of the time to name a day, he sent me word again that he had spoken to Count William Bentinck and to the Prince of Orange himself and that he had the Prince's permission to come to me. On the twenty-seventh of October, just before dusk, he would wait at *The Red Cow* in Wapping until I came.

On the twenty-seventh of October, therefore, I went most happily to meet him.

7

ESCAPE BY WATER

IT WAS no fault of mine that I was late on that evening of the twenty-seventh for the meeting I so much desired.

I had no difficulty in finding a boatman; we set out in good time to cross the river from Rotherhithe. But from that moment we met only frustrations and delays. A thin fog travelled with us so that we moved only slowly. When at last we arrived at Wapping we could not at first put in. A large convict ship loaded with poor souls condemned to transportation and slavery lay across our berth while a score of smaller boats filled with relatives of the condemned persons and with sightseers

blocked our way in.

When at last I was able to step on shore the crowds were so closely packed along the waterfront it was almost impossible to make a way through.

I was obliged to wait with them. Where was the ship bound? I asked.

For Virginia, someone said.

For the Indies, someone else declared.

No one knew. There were over a hundred men and women on board, it seemed, over a hundred Christian souls chained together on deck or roped together below. Bound for death, someone said. Bound for slavery, that at least I knew.

For a moment the fog lifted, the sun before it began to sink in the sky shed a burning glow on the crowded decks and the thin shrouds, on the quiet grey water, on the faces turned towards us and the uplifted hands. For a second I turned mortally afraid. This, only too easily, could be my fate also.

Thrusting my hood from my face, I looked away, and became aware for the first time of a clerkly-looking man standing beside me upon my left.

His eyes scanned my face. He spoke smoothly. "If I might learn the cause of your distress it is possible, mistress, that I might help you."

"I am here to meet my husband, sir," I said.

The crowd immediately about me having shifted a little, I moved away. I was aware as I did so that the man's eyes followed me.

A number of coaches were drawn up close to the kerb. I threaded my way past. Among them a large yellow-and-black-striped coach, bright as a wasp, caught my eye. Beside it a small claret-coloured carriage seemed to wait. Both were empty, only a blackamoor in charge. Since I could not come near *The Red Cow* I mounted a short flight of steps leading to a small raised platform and stationed myself near an old ship's figurehead of Minerva. The Lieutenant might more easily catch sight of me here, I thought, while I should be partly out of sight of anyone on shore. I had, I need not say, the claret-coloured coach in mind.

The fog was thickening but the light from one of the torches that were already lit along the waterfront fell upon my face. Sick from anxiety I looked about me.

The transport was moving out. The few prisoners still to be seen on deck — the rest had been herded below with shouts and blows — stretched out their arms to the shore. In common with everyone about me I stretched out mine. Ghostlike, but more beautiful than any ghost, the ship moved away.

Once more I sought everywhere among the crowd for the Lieutenant's face. Once more something like the anguish that comes in dreams seized me. And then the dream turned real.

Bareheaded, his cloak about him, the Lieutenant, clearly seen in the light of the torches, came thrusting his way towards me. I ran to meet him.

At the foot of the steps I was surrounded, rough arms held me fast, my head was forced back; even ruder hands covered my mouth. I struggled, but my captors were shameless: I struggled no more. Before they blindfolded me I saw the Lieutenant being borne away.

Arms pinned to my sides I was thrust into a small enclosed space smelling of snuff and leather and, I was ready to swear, of Master Knott's feet. Through the scarf that blindfolded me I could sense that I was not alone. A man, knees almost touching mine, was seated opposite me.

To the sound of wheels and the crack of a whip the coach, claret-coloured I did not doubt, moved off. Another and heavier vehicle — probably the yellow-and-black coach — followed.

Now that we were on our way my companion leaned forward and slapped my face.

"Caught," I heard — it was Master Knott's voice — "caught at last."

I felt no surprise; I was conscious of very little fear. I guessed what might follow; I knew what I must do.

I was slapped again. "And I have not finished with you yet," Master Knott declared. Straightway, breathing snuff and stale wine, he fell on me.

I fought back as I did not know I could fight, shamelessly. I

tore at his face with my nails — the scarf with which they had blindfolded me had slipped down and hung upon my chest — I grasped his head and sought for his eyes with both thumbs. As savagely as any woman could I brought up one knee and thrust at his groin. While he gasped I laid hold of his throat. My thumbs just below his Adam's apple as Marshall had at one time instructed me, I half-strangled him.

And then, filled with a measureless disgust, I pushed him from me — he was, as I have said, a poor specimen, more like a human maggot than a man — and attacked the door.

It yielded. I fell out and rolled a little way. The blackamoor on the box was slow to move; the fog, most mercifully, covered me. A narrow alley on my left, dark as a pit, led, I judged, to the river again. I made for it. As I ran I heard heavier feet than Master Knott could boast pounding after me.

As if a legion of demons were following I sped on. Under its thin cloak of fog the river flowed a few yards away; I could hear the slow suck and lap of the tide. Somewhere on the river I might find a boat, I told myself, that would take me on board. Between Master Knott and the blackamoor what choice had I? If I were taken how could the Lieutenant hope to muster his friends to his aid, or make his escape? My breath sobbing in my throat, I plunged in.

On this still night the water was mild as milk and not too cold. I swam manfully for a short distance, no-one after me, while the blackamoor, like a stray bullock, ran up and down the bank, bellowing.

Thanks no doubt to the blackamoor's cries a boat appeared darkly out of the mist. It seemed to wait. I made towards it. My wind almost gone, I was hauled on board, scrutinised in the light of a lantern and thrust down.

I was told to lie low.

I lay low, my teeth all of a chatter, my body quivering.

"Pull the tarpaulin over ye," I heard, "and stop them teeth chattering."

My hand in my mouth, I obeyed.

"Blackamoor after ye?" the voice said.

"Not only the blackamoor." In as few words as possible I

told all I dared tell.

Briefer than before the voice said, "So you jumped in."

We passed under a high wall by a flight of steps. I felt rather than saw my boatman point a hand. "That there is L'Estrange's house. He thought he'd like a river house, see, near the ships."

"It was L'Estrange's man who kidnapped me," I said.

"He's sick," the boatman said.

"I'm glad," I said.

"You talk like a Devon wench," the boatman said.

"I'm Dorset. From Lyme," I said.

"How did you come here?"

I told him how, and why.

"Sounds true," he said.

"It is true," I said.

"But you haven't told me all."

"No," I said.

"I've seen you," he said, "about Wapping-side, selling hot pies and such."

"And such," I said.

"I'll have to put you on shore," he added, head to one side, listening. "There's a boat out looking for you."

"The blackamoor will be in it," I said, shivering.

"Lie down and cover yourself," I was told.

Once more I did as I was bidden. I closed my eyes; I did my best to cover my ears also as the other boat overhauled us and drew near. There appeared to be not more than two men in her. Under a lifted corner of the tarpaulin I found enough courage to take note of them.

It was the blackamoor, poor fool, who must attempt to board.

What happened I do not know. I heard only a dull thud, I felt the hands that were weighing down the gunwale relax their hold and fall away. We rowed on.

"Will he drown?" I asked when it was safe to speak.

"If he don't swim he'll drown," my boatman said.

He put me on shore. I had no money with me, for my purse was gone. The bundle I had brought with me to Wapping had vanished also.

He would take no thanks. "I haven't seen you and I don't know you," he said. "And you haven't set eyes on me. True, ain't it?"

He nodded, then pointed a hand to where a few torches set well in from the shore burned. "Ragmarket there. Get yourself some dry petticoats. And be off. Quick."

It was a few minutes past twelve of the clock when, running as fast as I could on stockinged feet, for my shoes were lost also, I reached the Ragmarket. Only one light was burning. I ran towards it.

Though I spoke to the woman behind the one remaining stall she did not answer me but went on folding her goods and putting them away in pedlar's boxes, her lips moving all the while.

I held on to the wooden edge of the stall and addressed her a second time more desperately when she had finished her counting. "I pray you, ma'am, give me dry clothes in exchange for my wet ones."

Coming out from behind her stall, she fingered my cloak and gown. She whipped up my petticoats, dripping wet though they were, and fingered them.

She said, "I'll have the cloak."

"I must keep that," I said. I held on to it.

Her eyes lit on my left hand. "Then I'll have the ring."

It was of red Welsh gold, broad, and finely chased. Ah, Mistress Shylock, I thought. I gave it to her. It had been my mother's ring.

"And I'll have the stockings as well," she said.

I peeled them off. "Now," she announced, "you may keep the cloak." I was motioned behind a half-curtain.

In exchange for all the good clothes I had on me and my mother's ring I received a cotton petticoat and chemise, and a grey stuff dress.

I put them on and prayed as I did so that they had no acquaintance with the plague or the smallpox. At once, whether from dread of both or from having swallowed too much Thames water, I vomited.

Lifting up the half-curtain, Mistress Shylock enquired what ailed me?

"Thames water," said I.

She kept her eyes on me. "And you're not expecting? Or anything?"

I shook my head. "Not anything."

"And they're after you?"

"L'Estrange's men are after me," I said.

"What for?" She waited greedily.

"For his bed," I said. It was what she wished to hear.

"He's been cut for the stone. He's past it." She waited. "But perhaps he don't know it."

"Perhaps," I said.

She grew alarmed all at once. "Here, get inside *them*." She threw a pair of buckled shoes at me. "And be off."

"Which way?"

She put two fingers to her mouth and whistled twice.

A boy of about eight or nine years of age rolled out from under the counter of a neighbouring stall. He held both fists to his eyes, sleepily. His plush breeches reached almost to the ground.

She jerked her head. "See the lady off, Billy. Quick."

Billy lost no time. One hand firmly clasping mine, he set off at a fast trot down a maze of alleys and narrow streets. He halted only once, his ear to the ground. I listened also. Only the slow heavy footsteps of the Watch could be heard and the familiar London sounds — the clip-clop of horses' hooves, a dog barking, the shouts and songs of revellers rolling home. Beside these there were no other cries and no sound of running feet.

In the light of a torch burning in its iron bracket against a wall Billy halted. "I seen you off."

There was a melting darkness about him. He had round black eyes. I stooped and kissed his cheek. He wiped my kiss away hastily, then stood looking down at his hand.

So I left him. I fetched up at last after an eternity of London streets at Nan Maxwell's lodging in Blackfriars. I could go no further. Indeed, I might never have got so far if a parcel of washerwomen, off at this early hour before dawn to begin the next day's work, had not brought me along with them and themselves pounded on Nan's door. Like so many others it had

the plague cross in scarlet only half-rubbed out upon it still and the Plague Prayer, 'Lord have mercy upon us.'

Lord be thanked for his mercy, I thought, as Nan opened cautiously in response to our knocking and the washerwomen, like a gaggle of geese in a green pasture, made off, and Nan drew me within.

8

VIGIL BEFORE NEWGATE

ONLY now that I had reached comparative safety did the full force of what had happened to the Lieutenant and myself come home to me.

I slept that night, but my sleep was full of dreams. I thought I went from place to place, looking for what I did not know, dreading what I might find. I called for help and no-one heard; I looked about me for a friend and no-one was there. I woke, and the reality of the danger the Lieutenant and I were in was sharper than any dream and so burdensome it was scarcely to be borne.

Before Nan was astir I was dressed and gone. Spurred on by some faint hope of rescue I returned to Mrs Calvert.

She received me thankfully. When she had heard my story and listened to all that I had to say she had only disappointing news to give — that Marshall was in Holland, that he had not said where he might be found or when he might return.

Her news left me sick at heart. Only Marshall could advise me, I felt, only he would know at this turn in our affairs what should be done.

While I stayed sick and silent Mrs Calvert laid a hand on mine. "Mistress Deborah, you must learn never to despair."

"The Lieutenant is in Newgate. I am certain of it," I said.

She said, even more gently, "Indeed I think it most likely. But in Newgate everything may be had for money and your

husband is not poor. In that part of the prison which is called the *Castle* you may buy yourself good food and wine and a feather bed. If you are without money you will lie in the *Stone Hold* with rats for company and no more than your own filth between you and the cold stones. I know, for my husband lay there without trial until he died."

"I will never allow that to happen to the Lieutenant, never," I said.

"Then you must get busy," she said. "Where will you go first?"

"To Wapping." I stood up.

Mrs Calvert stood up also. "Go now," she said, her face white. "Take your hood and cloak. And God be with you. Though He never was with me."

I left her to her sorrow and her bitterness and prayed they might not be mine. Perhaps God who was so much else was suffering and sorrow, too, I thought. But we know nothing. We move always like people in a mist.

I sought out Mistress Alice at *The Red Cow*.

Like Mrs Calvert she was brief. "Mrs Deborah, what will you have me do?"

She must convey a message to Captain Gaunt, I said, for delivery to Master Marshall. I wrote out my message but left it unsigned and unsealed.

"I pray you come," I wrote. "I have great need of you."

I remembered the Lieutenants' cousin, Sir Gervase Sebright. On the best notepaper that could be bought in Cheapside I wrote to him from Mrs Calvert's room.

I did so, I said, out of anxiety for his cousin, Lieutenant Hobe, my husband, who had been taken by the Constables — here I gave the day and the time and the place — on what charge I did not know and conveyed I knew not where.

The Lieutenant, I assured him, had come to Wapping with only one purpose in mind. He had come solely to persuade me, his wife, to return with him to Holland.

From the love he had for my husband I begged Sir Gervase that he would help me now. Only he, I said, could discover where his cousin was imprisoned and what charge would be

brought against him.

Having signed my name, Deborah Hobey, I sealed the letter with the impress of my silver thimble, for I did not dare on this occasion to use my uncle's seal.

That done, I set out for Master Ned Muddiman's lodging at the back of the *Baynard Castle Inn* in the Strand.

A loyal printer and a member of the Stationers' Company, Master Muddiman had a high regard for Mrs Calvert and a small fluctuating tenderness for myself. He had been of great help to Mrs Calvert more than once and now I was determined to ask one favour of him for myself, namely, that he would carry my letter to Sir Gervase Sebright and bring me any answer he might receive.

He was inclined to bargain with me at first. Planting himself squarely before me, he wished to know if I would make shift with him in the way of matrimony if my present husband should come to an end. When I reproached him for a notion so unworthy of him he went off somewhat huffily, letter in hand.

Seated on a bench by Paul's Walk I waited while dusk crept on. When the last spades from the building of Saint Paul's were being scraped and the ladders stowed away I caught sight of Master Muddiman coming towards me with a sprightly step and an unnaturally long countenance. From both I guessed that he had gathered some unwelcome news for me and some hopeful news for himself.

It was all as I had feared. Cousin Gervase was in France, it appeared, and my letter, which Master Muddiman had delivered, must await his return. As to when that might be no member of his household would say.

Once more I was thrust back sharply upon myself. I thanked Master Muddiman. Having done so, I walked on without any conscious knowledge of where my steps were leading me. I fetched up at last, as I might have known I would, in Snow Hill before Newgate gaol.

The prison, three-quarters newly built since the Great Fire, appeared nevertheless as old and grey as Sin itself; the four giant figures of Liberty, Peace, Security, and Plenty — Lord forgive all humbug in high places, thought I — loomed larger than life

in the London gloom; the statue of the famous Dick Whittington himself, at one time Lord Mayor of London, smiled smugly down. And so, I could not help but notice with distaste, did Master Whittington's cat.

A few scattered groups of men and women stood about anxiously. Half a dozen more 'men of straw', companions to those other professional perjurers and bearers of false witness who were always to be found parading before the Courts of Justice, paraded here also. A poor woman standing a little apart from the rest in a faded cloak patched with new bright purple cloth caught my eye. Head lifted, sparse grey hair blowing unnoticed about her face, a laden basket over one arm, she appeared to be alone. I crossed over to her.

She spoke at once. "I wish I might find him," she said, pointing with one hand at the gaol, "for I know that he is there."

"Is it your husband you are waiting for, ma'am?" I asked.

"I have been waiting for him these two years, all but three weeks and a day," she said. "And, mistress, all this long while I have had no word."

"I have had no word either," I said.

She addressed me with sudden energy. "Then you must do as I do. You must buy bread — you may not have any of mine for I have never enough — and you must wait here until the poor prisoners come to the bars to be fed. When you draw near to feed them you must look for him."

I bought bread from a neighbouring shop and waited as I had been advised to do. The 'men of straw' departed; the crowd grew. A bell rang down the corridors of Newgate repeatedly. In obedience, I could only suppose, to its summons the prisoners flocked to the bars. More clamorous than birds they thrust out stick-like arms and hands like claws.

I drew nearer and filled their hands. When their hands were chained I filled their mouths. Their skins were seamed with dirt; a stench fouler than that from any hermit's cave came through the bars.

"Bread," they cried, "for the love of God, good people. Bread for the poor prisoners of Newgate, bread, bread . . ." I

gave them all the bread I had and came away.

From all my visits — I went there daily — I learned nothing. Meanwhile time moved on; Marshall and Cousin Gervase were absent still. I turned desperate therefore.

Unknown to Mrs Calvert I returned to Snow Hill after dark. In my waggoner's smock and breeches — a disguise I had not worn for many weeks — I joined the crowd waiting for Master Blow, the new hangman (Jack Ketch having died), outside *The Happy Release*, the Newgate tavern most frequented by turnkeys and other Newgate folk.

To-night, I learned, would be a gala occasion. To-night Master Blow, fresh from a hanging at Tyburn, would hold his Hangman's Party at *The Happy Release*. At this same Party Mistress Kate Keyes, his cousin, (whose late husband had been Master of Newgate's Pigeon Post) would auction on behalf of Master Blow his hangman's rope. When the drink went round the tap-room would be more than usually lively with bawdy talk and merry Newgate tales of prisoners and hangmen and the strange accidents that could attend a hanging or hinder a happy release. Among so much talk I hoped I might hear the Lieutenant's name mentioned or encounter a turnkey who might be persuaded to give me news of him.

When the crowd began to move in to the taproom I moved in with them. Once inside I kept my arms folded and my wits about me; when I drank I contrived to do so in a corner, manfully. The drink, a mixture of ale and raw spirits, was a poisonous brew. It burned as it went down; it brought on such a sweating and trembling that for a few minutes my head swam and I could scarcely see. With an effort I looked down into my mug: the pottery toad at the bottom gazed venomously back at me.

I set the mug down. A woman snatched at my hat, then tossed it back; a male bawd gestured and smirked from a few feet away. Not far off a turnkey observed me steadily. He had two pale glass marbles, I thought, for eyes.

The fumes of the drink mounting painfully in my head, I looked about me for some means of escape. I could find none. Swollen by a number of latecomers, the crowd of pimps and

bawds, of ex-prisoners and court gallants and the rest filled the taproom to the low dirt-encrusted door.

Once more I obliged myself to listen. To-day's hanging, it appeared, had provided the best joke in the annals of Newgate, for Master Blow had been so far gone in liquor as to come near hanging the prison chaplain by mistake. The crowd had applauded his choice, the condemned man had laughed himself sick and had gone out at the end of his ten yards of hemp still laughing.

In the midst of so much mirth the bell of Saint Sepulchre's church, which was always rung at midnight for the souls of the men and women condemned to die the next day, began to toll.

Excitement mounted within the taproom at the sound. Tomorrow's candidate for Tyburn was the centre of interest now. Though I listened to the talk and held my breath while I did so I could not catch his name.

He was not poor, it seemed, since the turnkeys spoke well of him. He was a right true gallant, they declared, and a brisk boy and a masher and a blade, as pretty a gentleman to go for a Collector as they had ever known.

A Collector, thought I, and breathed again. Even Judge Jefferies, that master of abuse, could not accuse the Lieutenant of being a highwayman. Saint Sepulchre's bell tolled still. Out of thankfulness I closed my eyes and wished the highwayman, whoever he might be, a safe deliverance, or, if that were not possible, a happy release.

When I looked about me again Mistress Keyes, blackringleted, monstrously fat and heavily pregnant besides, was mounted upon a barrel, the ten feet of hangman's rope coiled about her neck and over one arm. Master Blow stood beside her ready to slice off lengths of the rope with his hangman's knife. Clearly the auction was about to begin.

I waited. In a short while every length, duly chopped off by Sam Blow, was disposed of. The noose, which was auctioned last, was knocked down to a foppish young gentleman who hung it about his neck. His companion had a fiddle under his arm. To the tune of *The Three Blind Mice* they prepared to leave.

One hand valiantly upon my knife, I also made for the door, crying out to all those who barred my way that I was near vomiting. I was thumped on the back and slapped hard on the buttocks. Until I showed him my knife, blade pointing upwards in the manner best suited to the company, a turnkey aimed a kick at me. More frightened than I had ever been, I followed at the young gentlemen's heels. Having reached the threshold and stumbled a little way beyond it, the vile brew I had swallowed quite overcame me.

I was not alone in my distress. While I held my head and was a pitiable and altogether loathsome spectacle a man relieved himself against a wall, a woman squatting on her hams encouraged me in a hoarse wheezy voice — "Sick up, dearie, and swill some more."

I sought shelter further along the same wall by an overflowing water butt. While I tried to clean my face and hands with a square of linen which I had brought with me I struggled with my own disgust. How far indeed had I travelled since I left Lyme! How much further must I go along the road I had chosen and learn nothing except the bitter sort of wisdom that comes to one from one's own defeat?

Sick and faint even yet, I leaned my head against the wall. The drips from the water butt and the cool dampness roundabout revived me. I could see the sky high over my head through a gap in the wall, a full moon riding above. I returned to myself. What was my discontent worth, I asked, or my disgust? I was not more foolish than most folk, nor more to be despised. I had chosen discomfort rather than dullness, danger rather than safety. I must take what came. Above all I must bear with myself. And now, like the sensible woman I always wished to be, I must return to Mrs Calvert and begin my Newgate search over again.

I listened and paused for a moment. I had been aware of heavy footsteps following me just after I had left *The Happy Release*. While I sheltered by the water butt they had halted, then moved on. Not halting at all now, they returned. Like a young plover in a field of clods I stayed where I was, I stayed close to earth. A darker shadow fell across the other shadows the moon cast on the cobblestones of chimney pots and houses and

broken walls.

I struggled to my feet. The turnkey whom I had taken note of in *The Happy Release* faced me.

"You're no boy," said he. "What's your game?"

"I wish it were a game," I said, my hand on my knife.

He did not appear to move and yet in a second he had my hand in such a grip the knife fell to the ground.

"I see you had a bodkin," he said, releasing me.

"I have friends too," I said, both hands pressed against the wall.

"Name them." He continued to stand over me.

I shook back my hair — my hat had fallen to the ground. "Why should I tell you?"

He took me by the throat and shook me twice. "That's why."

I motioned to him to take his hand away.

Surprisingly he did so. "Now let us hear about your friends."

"My husband for one," I said. "His cousin, Sir Gervase Sebright for another."

"Husband — " He scoffed. "Show us your ring."

"And lose it," I said.

"I could take it," he reminded me.

I gave him the Lieutenant's signet ring which I wore suspended on a ribbon round my neck.

Turning the ring over in his hand, he said, "Where is your husband then?"

I told him where the Lieutenant might be.

"What's he done?"

"Nothing," I said.

"That's what they've all done," he said.

"And Sir Gervase," — he mocked me again — "where is he?"

"Away on the King's business at the moment," I said. (I invented this.) "But he will return. You may enquire about him if you please."

"If I please," he said and paused.

I nursed my bruised throat and did not speak.

"So you came looking for your man here," he said, "only to run off like a scared rabbit, a-vomiting."

I said nothing.

"And before that," he went on, "you talked to old Ma

Sprigg at feeding-time and listened to her."

I did not speak.

"She's cracked," he said. "Her son went Tyburn-way two years back."

"Her son?" The words escaped me.

"Son or husband, she don't know the difference," he said.

"Jack Ketch did *his* business. Sam Blow took care of the son."

Poor soul, I thought.

"She'll never find 'em," he continued, his eyes on me. "And you haven't found your man, either."

"No," I said.

"Why not throw a message in next time you come?" He waited.

Forgetful of the insults and the violence I had received I spoke eagerly. "I will."

"And see what happens?" He walked beside me down Snow Hill, always keeping a foot or two away. At the bottom he halted.

"I'll have a hundred guineas for this bit o'work in the finish," he said, going on again.

"In the finish," I said.

Once more he halted. "The name is Goad, Walter Goad."

"I'll have my ring, Master Goad," I said, "if you please."

"You can have it," he said with something like a grin. "But it don't please." He gave me my ring.

* * *

Next morning, as the sun was breaking through the yellowish London mists I was once more on Snow Hill. A dense throng of spectators come to witness to-day's hanging were there before me, restless and crowding on both pavements and about every door.

I waited with them.

By nine o'clock the hangman's cart, Master Blow, arms folded, sitting upon the condemned man's coffin, drew up before the turnkey's lodge. The hanging procession, made up of turnkeys and constables and a squad of red-coated soldiers, the City Marshall in command, formed up before the gaol.

To the tolling of Saint Sepulchre's bell and the cheers of the crowd the gates opened and the condemned man, attended by two gaolers and the prison chaplain, appeared. Obedient to an impulse I could not have named, I pressed nearer.

Like an actor on a Drury Lane stage the condemned man doffed his hat and bowed to us all. At once I recognised him. Here, almost at his road's end, was the highwayman Jasper and I had encountered on our way to Taunton. He had secured a place in Captain Julian's ship, the *Margaret*, when she got away, only to return, I thought, to this!

His eyes, smiling and dark with the knowledge of his own death, lit in that moment, I believe, on me. And so I curtsied to him for the days that were past and the journey he must take. As if they scented some romance the crowd cheered again while Saint Sepulchre's bell tolled still.

The condemned man took his seat in the cart beside Sam Blow. At the last moment, to fresh huzzas from the spectators, a short red-faced individual whom I took to be the Keeper of Newgate's Pigeon Post, came puffing and blowing out of the turnkey's lodge, a pigeon in a cage in one hand. He, also, climbed on board. The pigeon, whose duty it was to fly back to Newgate with the news of the cart's safe arrival at Tyburn and the prisoner's happy release, gave out a warm *cu-curru* and the procession moved off.

While I waited Snow Hill grew empty, the streets about Newgate quietened again and the prisoners flocked once more to the bars to be fed. I threw in my message and hoped that Turnkey Goad would not fail me.

My note, which was addressed by name to the Lieutenant, said quite simply that I had never ceased to look for him since he was snatched from me, that others beside myself were concerned for his safety. I begged for one word from him to set my fears at rest.

When no answering message reached me on the next day or the day after that the little faith I had in Turnkey Goad died. Out of nothing, I supposed bitterly, nothing came. On the fourth day, my basket empty of bread, I was moving disconsolately away when a twist of paper wrapped round a small hard object, which afterwards

turned out to be a silver button, fell not far from my feet.

The message, written in the Lieutenant's hand on the paper with which the button was wrapped, was as brief as my own note had been.

He was well, he wrote, and cheerful enough except that he was greatly in need of news of me and after that of a clean shirt.

From happiness this time I did not know where my feet carried me. When I arrived at Mrs Calvert's and found Marshall waiting for me my joy overflowed. I ran to him. He kissed my cheek.

As plainly as I could I told him all there was to tell. I produced the Lieutenant's letter.

He read it, frowning a little, then returned it to me.

"Turnkey Goad," he said flatly, "will do only what it is safe for him to do. It would be out of the way of the world for Sir Gervase Sebright to do more."

I agreed, and yet I continued to hope.

About five of the clock Master Muddiman arrived with the letter I had been expecting for so long from Cousin Gervase. It was a cold letter, I thought. It offered no comfort, it told me nothing I did not know. My husband was in Newgate, it said, but upon what charge Sir Gervase did not know. He would attempt to discover more — meanwhile he requested that I should be patient. I stood by the window for a second with the letter in my hand.

Marshall took it from me and glanced at it. "What did I tell you?" Grabbing his hat, he left suddenly.

During the days that followed I saw nothing of him, I heard nothing from my husband's cousin either. In the absence of all news it was possible to imagine everything. Never, I think, was any woman more miserable. Sometimes I despaired, sometimes I took refuge in daydreams; at other times I looked within myself for that quality which men call patience, and found it too.

From the exercise of that most detestable of all virtues I was delivered on the afternoon of the Twenty-third of December.

I was standing by Mrs Calvert's small window wrapping three pink-and-white sugar mice in rice paper (which she could eat), for Melinda Ann Mattravers' Christmas gift when I caught sight of Marshall making his way towards us on the opposite side of the narrow street. There was an air of freedom about the way he came;

he was wearing — in the next second I noticed it — a seaman's cap.

Without more ado he came in. And now I saw he had a small silver sweetmeat box unwrapped in one hand. "From the Lieutenant." He laid it on the table before me. "From Amsterdam."

I turned it over stupidly between my hands. Then he is safe, my mind went, safe . . .

"Be careful," Marshall said, and one of the sugar mice, dislodged from the narrow window-sill where I had laid it, fell with a faint slither of rice paper to the floor.

I looked at him. "And you are safe also," I said, thankfulness flowing over me like warmth after cold.

"Only the sugar mouse is hurt." He stooped and picked it up and set it on the window ledge again.

"Will it mend?" Queerly faint all at once I leaned against him.

"Everything mends, or ends," he answered, a gentleness about him that seemed new. He touched my hair. "Now open the box."

Though this was December a rose, damask red and smelling marvellously sweet, lay within wrapped around with a lace handkerchief and a message in the Lieutenant's writing — "Must I fetch you?"

"The Lieutenant will send you a white rose the next time," Marshall said.

A red rose breathed of passion, I remembered, a white rose spoke of love.

"I will wait for the white rose," I said.

"I would not." Marshall looked hard at me. "Well now, shall I tell you how we got away?"

"If you please," I reproached him in the next breath. "All this long while you have told me nothing."

"Because we dare not," he said. "You will see why. Really it was all quite simple. Two washerwomen on their way out of Newgate in the early morning after the wash on the night before turned back to pick up a bundle they had left behind. They came out with the bundle. Another washerwoman, a tall lean wench, came out with them."

"The Lieutenant?" I said, marvelling. "And no-one noticed?"

"No-one," Marshall said. "We chose our time, and paid our man, Turnkey Goad, and a few more besides. We paid them well.

And confided in no-one. And fortune favoured us. The morning fog was thick in the air, clear on the ground. Added to that a Newgate stench denser than any fog was pouring down on us from the Stone Hold, setting us all coughing and wheezing. Even Turnkey Goad was obliged to hold a handkerchief soaked in vinegar to his nose."

"They were washerwomen who helped me find Nan Maxwell's lodging," I murmured, marvelling again.

"They go everywhere in the small hours," Marshall said. "Their work must be finished before it is light. And so they carry their bundles of half-dried washing out of Newgate and a great many other grander places besides. When it is dry and ironed they bring their bundles in again."

"But still I cannot see how the thing was done," I said.

"By stages," Marshall said. "I went in first in the company of a laundress whom I knew — one, Moll Platt. I took the place of her sister who was sick. I wore a cushion in front of me and one behind and I was no more bearded than one or two of the rest. Moll dressed me for the part and primed me well in all I had to do.

"Most of the time she worked along with me. We worked by rushlight, remember, and began and finished in the dark. I went in and out alone at first, and then with Moll until the other women and the turnkeys who were not in our secret were used to me. After a while we took Sir Gervase with us and had him to work as an extra hand at our tub. Now and then, in order to confuse everyone, we left him behind."

I could not help but marvel again that Sir Gervase Sebright should turn Newgate washerwoman.

"These court gallants enjoy low life," Marshall declared. "And the folk we washed for, remember, were in the Castle. They were fine folk with fine laundry that could be half finished and taken out, then brought in fit to wear again."

"Having begun in a proper sort of fashion the rest, as I have told you, was simple enough. We took the Lieutenant's disguise to him in a bundle of clean linen the night before. While His Majesty's Washerwomen of Newgate were on their way out in the early morning hours Sir Gervase and I turned back to pick up a bundle we had left behind. The Lieutenant, a very nice young

washerwoman indeed except that he was a sight too thin, came out with us, bent double under a bundle of his own clothes."

"We passed Turnkey Goad in the fog. He stood by the prison gates — we had arranged that — blowing his nose into his new red handkerchief as loud as if he were one of Master Bunyan's trumpeters.

"At the bottom of Snow Hill we had a plain coach waiting. We changed in that. At Westminster Stairs two gentlemen and a tall young woman muffled up in a cloak went on board a wherry. That also was waiting."

"Then Wapping," I said. "And the *Red Cow* and the *Elizabeth Gaunt*."

"Re-named *The Princess of Orange*," Marshall said. He laughed. "Will it not make a good chimney-corner tale?"

PART SIX
THE YEAR OF THE BISHOPS

TRUMPETS OF SEDITION

I WRITE now of the year sixteen hundred and eighty-eight, that year of crisis and Revolution, and of the fresh miseries and dangers that beset me then and my deliverance from them.

These new miseries and dangers fell on me partly from the events of that year and partly, as you might guess, from my own folly.

The year came in almost unnoticed. Not until April did events warn us of what was to follow. The Queen's pregnancy continued. In itself that might have been warning enough since the fears of religious strife and civil war that sprang from it continued also. For my part I was so occupied with comfortable thoughts of my own happiness I paid little attention to them. The dangers we were in were no greater, I told myself, than they had been. The birth of the Queen's child was not expected until July. A great many things might happen before then, I thought, and I would wait for them. So I went on very comfortably, and very blissfully also.

Messages from the Lieutenant continued to reach me from Amsterdam. They did not vary. He desired my company above all things; he would have me believe that it was dangerous to delay any longer.

I treasured his messages as I treasured everything of his in these days. But still I delayed and hardly knew why I did so unless it was from fear that this second attempt on our part might lead to fresh disaster.

By the end of April it was plain that affairs between King and people were worsening rapidly. A fresh challenge to Liberty and the Law from King James had united all parties against him. In this new and final stage of our three years old struggle it was the Bishops of the Church of England who led the way. And this surprised everyone since they had always been the King's staunchest allies.

During the greater part of his reign, for almost three years, that is, King James had ruled without Parliament. Now, on his own authority he attempted in his *Declaration of Indulgence* to force toleration in religious matters upon a most unwilling people.

Freedom of worship not only for members of the Church of England but for Nonconformists and Roman Catholics also sounded well. But no-one trusted King James.

Already, wherever possible, he had replaced Protestants by Catholics – on the Town Councils, on the governing bodies of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge and in the Cabinet itself. He had appointed Catholics as Judges and Justices of the Peace; he had brought over Irish Roman Catholics to act as commissioned officers in his Protestant army and he had put Roman Catholic bishops into Protestant benefices. In all these matters he had acted dead against the law as laid down by Parliament and agreed to by Englishmen.

It was not surprising that the Bishops and clergy of the Church of England should interpret this new Declaration as one more attack upon them and upon their Church, not surprising that the great mass of English people should agree with them.

The King had issued his Declaration on the Twenty-seventh of April. On the Fourth of May he commanded that it should be read on two consecutive Sundays in every church and chapel within the kingdom. In London the reading was to take place on the Twentieth and Twenty-seventh of May; elsewhere then London upon the Third and Tenth of June.

The response of the Church of England to the King's commands was neither slow nor half-hearted. On Friday the Eighteenth of May six Bishops of the Church of England, whose names are famous now, crossed the Thames from the Archbishop of Canterbury's Palace at Lambeth to the King's Palace at Whitehall. They carried with them the Church's answer to the King. It was in the form of a Petition drawn up and signed by Archbishop Sancroft himself. It declared that the King's Declaration was unlawful. The Bishops could not, it concluded, in conscience read an illegal Declaration in the House of God.

In a few hours their answer was printed (though not, I think,

by our Confederacy), and sold at a penny a copy about the London streets. No printed matter ever sold more quickly. On the same day a letter by another eminent Englishman, whose name is still unknown, was printed secretly and circulated by post and carrier's cart to every clergyman of the Church of England and every citizen of note within the country. Its message was one that everyone who received it could understand. It was brief. "If we read this Declaration we fall to rise no more; we fall unpitied and despised."

So the trumpets of sedition, in the King's own phrase, were sounded and the battle begun. Matters stood at this point of danger when I set out once more for the Midlands on Mrs Calvert's affairs. On the Seventh of June I took the carrier's cart from Banbury for London again. We were due in Charing Cross upon the Eighth. On that day, Friday, the Eighth of June, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the six Bishops were to be brought before the King for questioning.

With every mile I travelled towards London my anxiety and my excitement grew. From Aylesbury to Paddington village the roads were crowded with carriages and horsemen bound as we were for London. Edgware Road was thronged with sightseers, at Tyburn the empty gallows creaked, I thought, invitingly.

It was late in the afternoon of the first hot day of the year when we came to Charing Cross. I made my way on foot down Whitehall. The sun seemed to stand still in the sky, the horses in the many waiting coaches drooped their heads in the heat, while the crowds — there were crowds everywhere — were silent. Nothing moved behind the tall windows of the Palace of Whitehall. No priest showed himself, no member of the King's Council took snuff nor was Mumpers, the King's mastiff and the most ill-tempered dog in the kingdom, or so it was said, to be seen.

With some difficulty I made my way to a point near the water's edge just below Whitehall Stairs where Marshall and I had agreed that we should meet. How to discover him in so vast a throng I did not know. It stretched from Westminster to London Bridge while the river itself was so thick with ships and wherries and rowing boats only a narrow channel for navigation remained between.

I spoke anxiously to a carpenter's apprentice who was standing beside me. "Sir, have the Bishops been admitted to the King's presence yet?"

"They have been there these three hours, mistress," he said.

While everyone waited a ripple of feeling ran through the crowd. All around me the tumult and the murmur grew.

Once more I could not help but address my neighbour. "Sir, what is it now?"

"I know not." He stood on tiptoe. "I know not," he was beginning again. But then he paused and his face, colourless as tallow candles before, became suffused with red.

"It seems," he said, coming flatly down upon his feet, "it seems, mistress, that the Bishops have resisted the King a second time and are for the Tower."

At first I could not believe my ears. It was impossible, I thought, that any King of England in this year of sixteen hundred and eighty-eight should be capable of so much folly. The imprisonment of the Archbishop of Canterbury and his six Bishops would confirm every suspicion English people had of the King and his new tolerant doctrines. For what tolerance in religious matters was he showing here towards the Church of England whose principles he had sworn to defend? Why, none, I thought. On his part all was bad temper and bigotry.

The Bishops had resisted the King's demands, it is true. They had done so on grounds of conscience and legality. For that they must be committed to the Tower; for that they must pass through Traitors' Gate and stand their trial for seditious libel and in all likelihood, since scarcely anyone accused by the King was ever judged innocent, be condemned. What then? I thought. What then?

I stood lost for a moment in the passion and whirl of my own thoughts when my carpenter acquaintance spoke again. "The Bishops are on their way now."

I looked towards Whitehall Stairs but could see nothing. Indeed, from the fearful swaying of the crowd and a weakness I felt within myself I found it difficult to keep my feet. But then I felt a hand on my elbow steadying me.

I turned and Marshall was there. He spoke quietly. "A barge is

bringing the Archbishop and the six Bishops from Whitehall Stairs now. If they are indeed on their way to the Tower you and I will follow them."

We waited on board a Thames wherry for the barge to pass and the many hundreds of people about us on shore and in other boats and wherries waited too. A swan caught in a burnished pool of light rose out of the water a little way and flapped its wings, then dropped again. Presently the sound of oars could be heard. Moving smoothly over the surface of the water the barge drew near.

At sight of Archbishop Sancroft and his six Bishops standing on deck a shout went up from the crowd — "God bless your worships, God defend you, sirs." Every head around me was bared; many people waded waist-deep into the water to beg a blessing, many more fell upon their knees.

Amid scenes that were surely never equalled in England before the seven passed to their imprisonment within the Tower. As they did so all the craft in the river, including our own, like a grand covey of water birds plied after them.

* * *

When we were once more in Mrs Calvert's room Marshall, who had been silent most of the way, spoke as if feeling were pent up in him also. "Would it not be laughable if this affair of the Bishops should bring our long struggle to an end?"

"Should we not be thankful," I asked quickly, "if it did so?"

"Thankful," he said, "that these Bishops of the Church of England who came so late to the struggle should carry off the glory and keep their lives? No, I cannot be thankful."

"You speak bitterly," I said.

"I have been schooled to bitterness," he replied, "by the sight of so many scaffolds. But I do not grieve for my friends so much now if the truth be told. I grieve chiefly for myself that wherever I love I lose."

And you lose now, I thought, you lose to the Lieutenant and to me. I looked away, all that I felt of understanding and something more written, I am very sure, too plainly upon my face.

Across Mrs Calvert's table he leaned nearer me. "There comes

a time, Mistress Deborah, when two people can deceive themselves no longer. They must come together or forever stay apart. So I must ask you – when will you go to Holland?”

I knew that I must answer. I named a day.

He turned from me. “If I were the Lieutenant,” he said, “you should not keep me waiting.”

I stayed unhappily where I was after he had gone. While I grieved for him and for myself also that I must lose so good a friend Mrs Calvert, bearing Melinda Ann Mattravers with her, came in.

She cast one look at me then spoke crisply. “You have no need to tell me what is wrong, Mistress Deborah. If your own face did not speak for you Master Marshall’s would. You must go to your husband and go quickly. From all accounts he is one who will know how to take care of you.”

I considered the Lieutenant for a moment. He had protected me and commanded me and laughed at me. He had kissed my eyelids once and once he had boxed my ears. From the beginning almost he had loved me, not for any perfection he saw in me but for what I was.

When I remembered all these things my mind that had been swinging in this direction, and then in that like a compass in a seaway steadied once more and steadied finally. I wished above everything else that he were near. I wished he might protect me and command me and laugh at me again if he pleased, as often as he pleased. In a word, I longed for him.

Mrs Calvert’s face cleared. “I think you will join your husband.”

“I will go upon the Twenty-ninth,” I said.

“The Twenty-ninth of June,” she protested. “But that is the day the King has fixed upon, they say, for the trial of the Bishops. All London will be in an uproar. You cannot go then.”

“Then I will go upon the next day. I will go upon the Thirtieth,” I said.

A PINK SILK PETTICOAT

ON THE morning of the Twenty-ninth of June I waited with Sukey at one of Mother Hall's tables for the Corporal to arrive. Sukey, silent for the moment, seemed half asleep while Young William, one bare arm outspread, slept heavily.

All that had happened since I parted from Marshall filled my mind. On the Ninth of June, the day after the imprisonment of the Bishops, Queen Mary of Modena was reported to be in labour. On the Tenth it was announced that she had been safely delivered, a month before her time, of a son. The Catholic heir so essential to the King's policies was here at last. Or so it appeared.

The announcement convinced scarcely anyone. From the beginning many prominent persons about the Queen, including the King's daughter, Princess Anne of Denmark herself, had never altogether credited the Queen's pregnancy. Now, from various odd circumstances attending the confinement very few people anywhere believed in the birth.

While King James continued blind to all that was going on about him a most important section of his people, it was whispered, were taking steps to be rid of him. The Navy had been rebellious for some time; the Army had at last turned hostile.

No pamphlet of ours was in greater demand at Hounslow Camp than the Reverend Samuel Johnson's *Address to all English Protestants in the Army*, in which he exhorted every serving soldier to use his arms in defence, if need be, of Parliament and the Protestant religion.

For me to visit Hounslow Camp to-day of all days when the trial of the Bishops was about to begin and when the King was expected to begin a review of his troops which was to last for a day or a day and a half was, I realise now, foolhardy in the extreme. Like brimstone butterflies in spring the King's spies could not help but be everywhere.

I went willingly. This was to be my last effort for the Cause before my retreat to Holland and safety. I did not grudge it,

therefore. It was vital, I knew, that the Army should be on the side of the nation. Only if the King were deprived of their support could the peaceful Revolution we all desired follow. I went all the more willingly since I believed myself in no greater danger then formerly. I had never sold our pamphlets within the Camp. Since April I had played no part in distributing them. All I had done during the last few weeks was to deliver her 'silence' money to Mother Hall.

Only a few minutes ago I had handed her the sealed packet Mrs Calvert had entrusted to me. She had received it, as she always did when I gave it to her, in the most surly manner possible. Why could she not smile? I thought. And who was the mean-looking creature with the long top lip who came out of the tent to peer shortsightedly at me?

I shifted my seat a fraction so that the sun's warmth fell more directly upon my face. It was pleasant indeed. A south wind blew, the grass blades silvered and shone. And Sukey was sitting up and wide awake.

"The Corporal's late," she complained.

"Ah, here he comes," she announced in relief the next moment as the Corporal bore down on us between the long lines of tents.

"Pleased with himself, isn't he?" she asked, hugging young William to her. "He's got every right to be, of course, him in the new uniform he's had to buy for this visit to the Camp the King is making, to-day and to-morrow, and me so big with this new child of his I can't hardly hold young William."

The Corporal greeted us from a foot or two away. "How do, Mrs Deborah? How do, Suke?"

"I don't do and that's the truth," Sukey said.

"Ah, but you will," the Corporal declared heartily. "You will, Sukey, see if you don't. Ah, 'tis Nature," he declared, sitting himself down beside me and taking young William upon his knee. "So I can't help it, girl, can I?"

I spoke severley. "If you were to marry Sukey, Corporal, that would help."

"I will, Mrs Deb," he replied. "I swear I will. One day." Jogging young William up and down, he continued, "I reckon

Sukey and me are married. Or as good as married. Looks like it, don't it, Suke? Ah, and feels like it too. What's the difference between being married and not married anyway? I'm sure I'm comfortable. And Sukey's comfortable, ain't you, Suke? Or you will be. We're both comfortable." He shifted the child to his other knee. "I only wish my new breeches wasn't so tight, that's all."

Staring straight in front of him at nothing in particular, the Corporal began to whistle *Lilliburlero*.

"Oh, that tune," Sukey cried, starting up all at once, then sitting down again. "Oh, I'm sick of it, I am."

The Corporal addressed me in injured tones. "Cross as two sticks Sukey is these days. I don't know what's come over her."

"It's you that's come over me, *you*," Sukey declared chokingly.

"Blaming me," said the Corporal, dumping young William in my lap. "I'm not wanted and I can see I'm not wanted. I'll be off." He stood up. "Good-day to you, Mrs Deb. Pleased to have seen you I'm sure."

"It's true what I said," Sukey exclaimed tearfully, looking after him. "Every bit of it is true. Oh, I hate him, I do. I hate everybody."

"Sukey," I cried protestingly. "Sukey."

She drew a deep breath. "I don't mean you. I mean him. He *can* go, can't he? He don't ever have to think of me. He don't ever have to think of anybody but himself. It's as well I'm not married to him, I know, selfish as he is, though I wish I was married to him. I could go and see my mother then, something she won't have me do now. There's times when I do want her so.

" 'Tisn't fair that men should go so fine and free in love and women fall so low and come to grief and pain and be thought nothing of. And be threatened with Hell-fire by another lot of men too . . . clergymen and *that* lot," Sukey said, and sniffed. " 'Tisn't merciful," she continued, drying her eyes fiercely, " 'tisn't Christian-kind. I don't know how God came to do everything this way I don't, and that's the truth."

Head down, she wept fiercely and young William, who had slept all this while in my arms, woke up and roared in sympathy and would not be pacified. And the little man with the long top

lip came out of Mother Hall's tent and stared at us and went in again.

"He'll know us next time," Sukey said, recovering. From all the weeping she had done she hiccupped suddenly.

Tear-stained but handsome still, she looked at me. "I did wrong over the Corporal. I know I did. But that's not all. I don't know how I'll get out of the pickle I am in now, I don't. But I always wanted one," she said, "always."

"Wanted what, in God's name, Sukcy?" I cried. Then all at once I knew. "Not a petticoat, a silk petticoat?"

"Pink like I said." Sukey nodded miserably. "On the counter of that mercer's shop in Cheapside. Pushed half out of sight. Pink, with a sky-blue frill and blue ribbons instead of strings."

"Were you seen?" I asked. "Oh, Sukey," I cried again, despairingly, "what can we do?"

"I didn't look round," Sukey said, whispering. "I made off down an alleyway like a real thief, quick, out of sight. But I thought somebody came out of the shop and called after me. So I reckon they know who it was. I never took anything before," she went on miserably. "and I never longed for anything before. Except cucumbers just before young William was born. And then I ate two. Will they hang me, on account of the petticoat, Mrs Deb," she asked, "if they find out?"

"You must get rid of it," I said, not answering her. "Then no-one can accuse you."

"But I don't know how," Sukey said, still whispering. "I'll be seen, won't I?"

That was only too likely, I thought. I spoke quickly. "Then you must bring it to me, at once. I will get rid of it for you. Somehow."

"I could bring it to-morrow," Sukey said, brightening.

"But to-morrow is the Thirtieth," I protested. "To-morrow is the day I am to leave for Holland."

"I can't bring it no sooner." Lips quivering, Sukey bent over Young William. He was quiet now. "Don't bother about me, Mrs Deb," she said.

For a moment I could decide nothing, while the prospect of what might happen to Sukey in the way of hanging or

transportation, and to Young William if Sukey were parted from him unfolded miserably before my eyes. How to leave Sukey to face so much trouble alone I did not know, nor how not to leave her.

I looked at Sukey and loved her again as I had loved her that first time. Two tears were coursing as if unknown to her down her cheeks. She appeared very alone and very valiant.

I looked away. I remember the bright green of the grass and the tranquil rain-washed sky and my own thoughts that had turned tranquil too. My plight was nothing, I told myself, compared with what might happen to Sukey or to Young William. What difference where I was concerned would part of a day make? In the evening I could be safe and away. Marshall could be warned, the *Princess Mary of Orange* (once the *Elizabeth Gaunt*), could surely wait for the next tide.

Leaning forward, I hugged Sukey and Young William and my own folly to me; I hesitated for one more instant and then, like a swimmer when the water is cold, I plunged in.

"To-morrow then," I said. "Make it to-morrow. The King will be at the other end of the Camp to-morrow, reviewing his troops. So be here — that will be safest — at this table, by nine of the clock." I stood up. "If you love me, Sukey, do not keep me waiting."

Sukey, clasping Young William to her and drying her eyes, stood up also and Mother Hall came out to look at us, then went in again.

"Sukey," I said when we were on our way out, "how long has the man who came out of the tent and stared at us just now been with Mother Hall?"

"He's new," Sukey said. "I can't stand him. He's got eyes like stones."

* * *

I returned to Westminster to find that the trial of the seven Bishops was still in progress.

I joined the throng outside Westminster Hall. It was like no other crowd I had ever seen it was so quietly expectant and so orderly. Only the most responsible Londoners seemed to be here.

There were rich folk waiting in their carriages, there were country gentlemen distinguishable from the rest by a shining redness of face and a somewhat old-fashioned air; there were prosperous merchants in good broadcloth and comfortable shopkeepers and artisans in their Sunday best.

A stout merchant, his wife on his arm, made room for me and answered all my questions. I gathered from him that one of the four Judges of the Court had spoken out boldly for Liberty in his address to the twelve members of the jury. The power, he declared, that King James claimed for himself of dispensing with the Law, whether upon this matter of religion or upon any other matter, was against the law of the country as laid down in Parliament and agreed to by the majority of English folk. If the King were to be allowed to dispense with the laws as he pleased there would be an end to Parliament.

"That issue," he continued, "I leave to you, gentlemen, and to your consciences."

On that note the jury had retired to consider their verdict. On that note also I returned thankfully to Mrs Calvert. In every window as I came along seven candles burned for the seven Bishops — seven candles against King James, seven candles for Liberty.

Mrs Calvert clasped me to her when at last I arrived. Where had I been? Why was I late?

I told her where I had been and why. Taking hold of Melinda Ann Mattravers who was standing up in my bed, I danced round the room with her.

"No more pamphlets," I sang out. "No more pies." Here I paused. "That is, if I am lucky. For I must go back to Hounslow to-morrow. I promised I would."

"Promised whom?" Mrs Calvert showed every sign of alarm.

"Mrs Sukey," I said. I would have gone on with my tale if Melinda Ann had not tugged at my arm. Everything she had to say in these days was important to her.

"A man," she started off, "a man . . ."

"What man?" said I, dancing off with her a second time.

"I did give him," she declared breathlessly, "a meat pie."

"Oh, why?" I sang out. "Oh, why?"

"You are mad, Mrs Deborah." Mrs Calvert was laughing in spite of herself.

"Mad at last," said I. "For Holland and my husband. Is it not time?"

I laid Melinda Ann, who was still trying to tell me something, upon my bed and sank down beside her.

"You are maddest of all to go back to Hounslow," Mrs Calvert declared. "However in the world did you come to make such a promise?"

"How could I help doing so?" I asked. While I told my tale of Sukey and her petticoat Melinda Ann went on prattling of a man who had called when Mrs Calvert was out. "I did tell him," she said importantly, "I did tell him . . ."

For the moment I was too excited to listen. Only afterwards did I begin to understand what sort of man it was who had questioned her and what she had told him.

"I declare," Mrs Calvert was continuing, "I declare that kindness of this sort to one person can be downright wickedness to another. It is the Lieutenant I am thinking of. And of what I shall say to Master Marshall when he comes for you to-morrow. Is he to go back to Wapping without you?"

"Yes," I said, sobering for a second, "yes, for his own and the Lieutenant's sake. Say I shall be away for a few hours only. Say, come Hell or high water, I shall be at Wapping before dusk, most thankfully."

On my feet once more, I caught hold of Mrs Calvert's hands.

"And then I'll be away," I sang,

"To New France, New England or New Spain,

"Round the world and back,

"And home again."

"It is to be hoped you will never go one half so far," Mrs Calvert said, bringing me to a halt and once more sobering me.

* * *

On the following morning, seated at the same table she and I had occupied the day before, in a part of the camp every bit as deserted as I had hoped it would be, I waited for Sukey. Nine o'clock came and went. I could not leave yet, I decided uneasily,

so close upon the hour. I continued to wait. The ten o'clock guard was mounted about the gates and still Sukey had not arrived.

Thoroughly alarmed by this time, I asked for beer from Mother Hall — it was one way of diverting my own thoughts — and drank it though it was poor stringy stuff. Hands on hips, petticoats tucked up, she came out before I had done and looked at me.

I spoke to her. "I wish Mrs Sukey were here."

"So it's her you are waiting for." She went in again.

And now her husband, if husband he was, appeared. I gave him Good Day very pleasantly and received no reply.

I sat down again. Without much success I attempted to convince myself that all was well: Sukey, I told myself, might have suffered any one of a number of very ordinary delays; at any moment, stumbling a little and quite out of breath, she would appear. She did not do so.

In the hope of arriving at some sort of certainty I went in search of Mother Hall a second time. "I cannot think," I said loudly, "where Mrs Sukey can be."

"I can," she said. Quiet as a toad her husband — I will continue to call him her husband — stationed himself beside her.

"She's asking for Mrs Sukey," Mother Hall said.

"I heard," the man said.

They laughed openly now.

Their laughter silenced me. Convinced at last of my own danger I returned to my place. As I did so two strangers brushed past me only to disappear — and this appeared sinister to me also — into Mother Hall's tent.

I would count up to fifty and go, I resolved. Having completed my count, I stood up. The two strangers had emerged from the tent and were standing beside Mother Hall. They moved also. Weaker than water, I sat down again.

I should have left long ago, I realised. But surely, my mind went, surely it was not yet too late. If only something would happen, anything, I thought, that might help me to get away.

All at once the diversion I had been praying for came. A messenger in the King's livery galloped past. I gazed after him.

As if his message were delivered he headed for the London Road once more. He was hardly out of sight when the Camp that had been quiet a moment before filled with movement, with distant bugle notes and the neighing of horses and the tramp of feet. A squad of Dragoons passed on their way to the cookhouse, whistling as they came. A drummer boy followed, beating madly upon a drum. All was uproar and noise and rejoicing. As if the King's Review of his Troops had been cut short, as if the King had left and left without ceremony small companies of men were to be seen making their way everywhere between the lines of tents.

More welcome than he had ever been the Corporal himself came in sight. I greeted him. Turning a lack-lustre eye upon me he volunteered only the one statement. "He's gone — just gone out of Feversham's tent. Gone home. The King, I mean."

"Why?" I wished to ask. It was difficult to make myself heard against the fresh tumult of sound that broke all about us now. Wave after wave of cheering came from every part of the Camp. Drum beats and bugle calls and the clanging together of saucepans and trays from the kitchens added formidably to the din.

I shouted in the Corporal's ear. "The King has gone home, you say. Then the Bishops are acquitted. It must be so."

"I said so, didn't I? But it won't help me to find Sukey, will it?" The Corporal spoke miserably. "She's left me," he said. "She's left Young William too."

"Sukey would never leave Young William," I declared.

I turned to the Corporal; I spoke rapidly, so afraid for myself now I could scarcely wait to be gone. "Sukey may be in great trouble. The Constables may have arrested her. You must find out."

The Corporal stared. "What sort of trouble?"

I told him what sort of trouble. On a sudden thought I let him know where Mrs Calvert might be found. "You must speak to her," I said. "You must speak to her secretly. Tell her I sent you." I paused.

The Corporal remained slumped in his seat as if all that I had said were too much for him or as if he had not heard. The cheering, which had died down for a moment, broke out again. In the midst of it a Foot Guard came towards us, hanging on to a large

bull mastiff at the end of a long chain.

"That's Tear-em." The Corporal brightened visibly at sight of them. "One of ours." Starting up like a man in a daze still, he made as though to go after Tear-em. At the last moment he paused. "Even if I've got to walk barefoot on broken glass all the way to China I'll find her," he said huskily. "I'll find Sukey."

Shambling a little and most unlike himself he went after Tear-em while I, as quickly as I could, but not at all hopefully, came away.

At once Mother Hall's visitors gave every sign of following me. When I quickened my pace they quickened theirs; when I halted they halted also. They were not so anxious to overtake me, it seemed, as to keep me in sight. My spirits fell to nothing, then soared; my wits sharpened.

On the other side of the double gates that helped to seal off this portion of the camp a coach bound for London appeared about to depart. As if I had been on the cliff top at Lyme I picked up my skirts and ran. I called to the coachman, I waved a hand. A squad of foot soldiers blocked my path. I made straight for them. I remember the gaping faces and the smell of bear's grease pomatum and raw leather that surrounded me. The ranks opened. Like a piece of round shot I cannoned through. The gates, six feet high and broad at the top, might have defeated me. I did my best to mount them and fell back, only to be hoisted up again and dropped most gallantly on the other side. The soldiers cheered and waved. I waved back. The coach was starting; I flung myself on the step, catching at the handle of the door as I did so. The coachman checked his horses, I was hauled within.

In the late afternoon after what appeared to be a journey without end I was duly set down at Westminster Stairs. No-one preventing me, I made my way through the crowd, close-packed though it was about the steps, and boarded a wherry. Without hindrance again we moved away. In the first hours of the June dark we came in at last to Wapping. The hulls of the many ships at their moorings gleamed wetly, the gulls showed white as snow-berries on the naked mast-heads, the lanterns set along the front were reflected brokenly in the grey water.

The *Princess Mary of Orange* was less than a hundred yards

away, drawn up close to the shore. Marshall appeared to be on the foc'sle, a lighted ship's lantern in one hand, another between his feet. A taller figure — I was certain it was the Lieutenant — stood beside him. Though I called to them most thankfully and ran forward, no-one answered me. I called again and was heard. With three up-and-down movements of the lantern Marshall or the figure I took to be Marshall signalled to me. I was safe, I thought. After so long a journey I was near home at last.

And then I caught the sound of running feet. I looked behind me. My pursuers, several Constables with them, were not more than thirty feet away. Desperately I ran on. If I could reach the shore I might yet escape. A Constable — so I learned afterwards — hurled his baton. Struck between my shoulders, I stumbled forward a pace or two, then fell headlong. My pursuers were on me in the next second. I was struck again. A singing noise filled my ears, a blackness queerly shot through with light poured in on me. It changed mercifully to dark, and then to nothing as all consciousness left me.

3

NEWGATE AT LAST

IT WAS dawn when Newgate gaol, as I had feared it would ever since I came first to Mrs Calvert's, claimed me at last.

* * *

Within the gaol the air was foul beyond all words and doubly dark. From piles of human excrement and garbage pools a rank mist rose. It swirled about the many corridors down which I went and the steep winding stairs; it choked my lungs and seemed to poison every breath.

My feet chained together, I lay at last in the Stone Hold, stone walls about me, a stone floor under me. It was underground. Here the dark was lit by the prisoners' separate candle flames, to

each prisoner who could purchase it his own candle to set beside him or hold in one hand, with which to light up his portion of the dark. Crocus-coloured – purple and yellow and mauve – they showed as lovely and as strange as orchids blooming in a marsh.

At first I saw only the candle-flames. Later, when my eyes grew used to the gloom, other shapes appeared out of the murk. A group of men, each with a coloured handkerchief tied about his head, played at dice in a corner; on my right a man in a leather jerkin, candle in hand, read to himself in a low voice from a large Bible spread upon his knees.

I moved, but movement was painful. My head in my hands, I stayed still. A number of my fellow prisoners were about me at once like bats out of a cave. Hands out, voices raised, they demanded 'chummage.' 'Chummage', I knew, was the price every common prisoner in Newgate must pay to his fellows in order to rank as one of their fraternity.

When I protested that my purse had been taken from me I was not believed. They would have torn the clothes from off my back, I think, if my neighbour in the leather jerkin had not come to my aid. Wielding his Bible like a flail – it was large enough and solid enough, too, bound between leather-covered boards and clamped with brass – he put them to flight.

I had hardly recovered from this assault when a turnkey, who was not Turnkey Goad, appeared. Dressed in a long black cassock, both palms extended, priestly fashion, he demanded 'garnish.' A turnkey, I remembered, must receive his 'garnish', that is, he must be tipped each day or the prisoner's life might be made unbearable for him. When once again I protested that my purse was gone Master Turnkey lifted my chains and weighed them in both hands. That done, he moved away. When I called after him in deadly fear that he would double them he did not turn his head.

And now I saw that without money and without friends I was lost indeed. For two shillings I might have hired a wooden shelf to serve me for a bed on the felon's side. If I had possessed even as little as twopence I might have bought a candle from the turnkey. But I had nothing. Almost past caring, I lay down again.

Here in the Stone Hold were worlds as private and unashamed as if seas or mountain ranges stood between. Next to the group

of men who played at dice two harlots and a man friend most patiently taught a girl child of six years old or so their trade. A coiner of bad money — so he declared himself — sat not far from me tossing his false coins in air and catching them again. A fortune-teller in a black cloak held a crystal ball upon her knees and looked within. A group of pickpockets staged a mock hanging by the opposite wall. A thief, legs sprawled, spread a small heap of coins, which he swore he had stolen from the turnkeys, between his knees. Other prisoners sat alone. Some whimpered, some wept, a few muttered angrily to themselves. These latter, I supposed, from all that I could hear, had lost their wits.

I could look no more. I leaned my head upon my arms and wished that I might sleep. A whiff of lavender from the pockets of my cloak came to me and from somewhere close at hand the clank of chains. I raised my head.

The neighbour who had been reading his Bible all this while spoke quietly. "Why are you here?"

"I sold pamphlets for Liberty," I said.

"And I am here," he said, "for lack of twenty pound."

* * *

As night came on and the candles were put out the Stone Hold became alive with the squeaks and scamperings of rats and mice. There were other more furtive scufflings and grunts and cries. I stopped my ears and held my skirts about me and prayed that no rat of any sort would step across my feet.

The false coiner on my right laid a hand on my arm. His fingers, I remember, tightened as he spoke — "Better plead your belly, mistress, when you come to trial. I'll do your business for you if you wish."

I understood him well and thanked him too. "I am already suited in that matter, sir," I said.

As indifferently as he had come he moved away.

I slept more sweetly that night than I have ever slept. It was as if the living and the dead watched over me I was so filled with peace and thoughts of home. I had been almost dead of heart; I woke to something like myself again. I would ask for Turnkey Goad, I resolved, and speak to him. I would appeal for

help once more to Sir Gervase Sebright.

My first night in Newgate slipped imperceptibly into day — once more the candles were lit, the same turnkey went his rounds. I spoke to him. He looked at me as if he weighed me in both hands as he had weighed my chains. Not answering, he moved on. But presently he brought me a panikin of water. It was clean enough, but full of tadpoles so slim and black they looked very like turnkeys. I fished them out. That done, or half done, I drank most thankfully. My Bible-reading neighbour shared a hunk of bread with me. So the day wore on once more — the two gamblers continued to play at dice, as passionately. And now a fine town gallant, tottering on high red heels, was thrust in. Though he turned his pockets inside out and swore he had been robbed, and swore again that my Lord this and Sir Somebody that would vouch for him the turnkeys left him with us in the Hold.

For a little while he entertained us well. He could play tunes, he said, upon his toothpick. Standing against an opposite wall he played one now. It was so little like a tune it made us laugh. He had two watches — he showed them to us — one to tell the time, the other to tell him what the time was not. He had killed a man, it seemed, in a male bawdy house by Charing Cross. Presently, in great good humour, jingling their keys, two turnkeys came in. Our fine gallant, rescued by his friends, was ushered out.

Though the door opened to a fresh stir I sat on as dull as any toad. The false coiner passed me with an air, then turned and dribbled coins into my lap. "Since I cannot serve you otherwise, ma'am," said he, "take these. The crowd that sees me swing to-morrow shall have the rest."

A batch of prisoners went out with him; a new batch was thrust in. Among the newcomers a young woman shrouded in a dark cloak caught my eye. Hood pulled forward, hands to her face, she sat sideways to me a little way off and wept heart-brokenly. I was strangely stirred and yet I made no move to comfort her. Having bought a candle from the turnkey and lighted it, she ceased to weep and hiccupped violently instead. And that, though I could not think why, troubled me.

I held my fingers to my ears, my elbows on my knees. Once more a whiff of lavender came to me from the pockets of my

cloak. Once more, drowned in misery though I was, I think I slept for I heard nothing and felt nothing for a while until a voice filled with the hiccups that come after tears broke in on me. "May I not share my candle with you, ma'am?"

The candleflame confused me for a second. Then eyes and mind cleared.

Between more hiccups the voice said, "I would do no more than sit beside you. I would not speak."

I thrust my hood from off my face and clasped her to me, most awkwardly. "Sukey," I cried, "oh, Sukey —"

The candleflame went out; I felt the warm tallow drips upon my hand and Sukey's tears. "Oh, Sukey," I cried again helplessly, "Sukey."

"Mistress Deborah —" I heard, and then in a smothered voice, "Oh, I wish I might stop hiccupping."

* * *

Sukey and I had only that night in which to be together.

Justice is swift in Newgate: soon caught, soon despatched is the rule. While my neighbour, the coiner of false money, waited in the condemned cell I was taken to my trial in the Court Room of the Old Bailey.

From the prisoner's box I looked about me. The Justice Hall contained, I felt certain at first, not one face I knew. While I was glad that Marshall and Mrs Calvert were absent, since they could only attend at great risk to themselves, I could have wept from a sense of my own loneliness. While I struggled with my thoughts a movement on my left caught my eye. The taller of the two men stationed so near the prisoner's box passed a white rose across his lips, then tossed it to me. I caught it with both hands.

His eyes on mine, a message in them I could not help but read, the Lieutenant smiled at me. I marvelled to see him there. I marvelled more that a laced hat and a chestnut-coloured periwig should so easily make a court gallant of a man. At sight of him the burden I had borne these last two days lifted for a second; I felt reassured; I felt happy. I looked at his companion whom I took to be Sir Gervase Sebright and marvelled again that two cousins should bear so little resemblance to each other. For

while the Lieutenant was tall and fair Gervase was square and thick-set and gipsy-dark.

With the entrance of one of His Majesty's Judges my time for marvelling was past. From this point my thoughts centred upon myself. I listened at first, and then I almost ceased to listen. The trial dragged on; every witness was against me; I had no defence. On the evidence that had been presented so far I knew that I must be condemned. I had worked for the underground printing trade, I had distributed forbidden printed matter, I was under grave suspicion, even if proof were lacking, of having sold seditious pamphlets within Hounslow Camp.

The prospect of hanging or transportation filled me with anguish. Tyburn Tree, whither my old acquaintance the highwayman had gone, was as terrible to me as it had ever been, while a sentence of transportation for life or even for fourteen years was hardly less so. For a second I was aware of chance that plays such freakish tricks upon us all and of fortune that betrays us in the end. I turned the Lieutenant's rose between my fingers. It spoke, I knew, of love. It had, and that seemed strange to me, no thorns.

While I waited in a dull sort of fashion and did not dare to hope there was a stir at the back of the Court. Out of pride, for I was unwilling to show too much concern for myself, I refused to turn my head.

Neither Mrs Calvert nor any printing acquaintance of mine appeared. Instead, Melinda Ann Mattravers was brought in, borne shoulder-high by a stranger between two constables and crying fit to kill herself.

At sight of her my calm deserted me, the blood rushed to my face, I felt myself trembling. That she whom I had taken for my own should be brought in to witness against me was an unkindness I had not reckoned on. Now, too late, I could round off the story she had begun to tell Mrs Calvert and myself of the stranger who had questioned her as to what I did, and how she had answered him.

If, quite innocently, she had betrayed me then she could by no means be persuaded to betray me now. Sobbing bitterly, so that I longed to comfort her, she would only repeat in her small

child's fashion that Mistress Deborah had meat pies to sell that day the gentleman spoke to her and Mistress Deborah did give Melinda Ann a little pie to eat and the gentleman did give her a sugared plum.

However much the Judge himself questioned her she answered only the same thing as if pamphlets and papers were unknown to her and the words that had helped to put me in Newgate had never been spoken. At last, weeping still, she was borne away in the arms — to my great relief I took note of the fact — of the two constables.

When sentence of transportation to one of His Majesty's colonies for a period of fourteen years was passed upon me I felt at first nothing but thankfulness. I should not hang, I thought, nor burn as Mistress Elizabeth Gaunt had burned; Saint Sepulchre's bell would not toll this midnight for me. Other infinitely disquieting thoughts were to follow — but not yet.

Obedient to Turnkey Goad's hand upon my elbow, I turned. As I did so the Lieutenant's eyes met mine in a look so charged with love I can feel it yet. His rose between my hands, I was thrust on towards what fearful journey and what far-off unknown place?

4

A SHIP BOUND FOR WHERE?

I WAS not alone in my trial or sentence. From Newgate some thirty other poor souls, from the Gatehouse prison some twenty more were to travel with me. Ocean bound for Virginia, or so we believed, for we could learn nothing with any certainty, we were to sail in the *Esperance*, convict ship of the City of London, from Wapping on the ebb.

The wind was blowing lightly from the south-west, and the tide was already on the turn. Some sort of farewell in mind I looked about me. The south bank of the river faced us; the pale blue-and-white plastered houses showed neat as ever under a

washed blue sky. I heard again all the familiar sounds — the wind in the riggings of the ships, the sailors' hoarse shouts and the sea-gulls' cries. The windows of the *Red Cow* caught the light of the September sun and a crowd, as on that other day when I came to Wapping, was waiting. The *Esperance* waited too, her fifty passengers, of whom I was one, crowding the decks, all eyes on shore.

She began very slowly to swing round. As she did so the gulls lined up at the water's edge lurched suddenly into flight and the crowd surged nearer. I believed I could distinguish Marshall and the Corporal in the front rank of those on shore. My eyes sought anxiously among my companions for Sukey. A young woman big with child, in a large chip hat from which a blue rose dangled, caught my eye. She turned her head. It was Sukey indeed, but a Sukey so worn with fretting as to be quite unlike herself.

I called to her. Though she looked in my direction she made no answering sign. The Corporal held young William on one arm. Both fists to his eyes the child wept. The Corporal, as if he also were in tears, held a large red handkerchief drooping from one hand. Sukey gazed at them — by this time I could see her well — with a face of stone.

Slowly at first, then faster and faster the *Esperance* gathered way. The neat houses, the low banks slid past. A cry, something of despair in it, was as though wrenched from us all, an answering cry came from the crowd, Marshall raised an arm in farewell, I answered with the same gesture. And that was all. Wind and tide with us, we were moving down river and away — we could see the faces we knew no more.

More like cattle than human souls we were thrust down into the ship's hold. Fifty feet or so in length, it was evil-smelling and almost Newgate dark. Pillars of wood supported the deck here and there. Ship's lanterns, two on each side, swung on hooks from the deck beams casting long oily shadows and yellow gleams upon the boards.

We had scarcely moved below when a sailor whom I knew afterwards as the ship's Boatswain, came tumbling down the hatchway ladder. He landed — I had joined up with Sukey by this time — almost at our feet. The ship's Carpenter followed more sedately. They were come, it seemed, to knock off our

chains. This they did with surprising ease, the Carpenter silently, the Boatswain (which surprised me) whistling *Lilliburlero* all the while.

When Sukey's turn and mine came to be freed he cut short his whistling in order to joke at our expense. To me he said, "Now you may go run races, ma'am, if you wish, when she starts to roll." He declared cheerfully of Sukey, "Here's one that will soon make two."

How soon? I thought in alarm.

"How soon?" I enquired of Sukey when the Boatswain had moved on. She considered the matter listlessly for a moment and then declared that for the life of her she could not be certain.

I said no more but busied myself in finding a corner to hold us. We chose a spot where a patch of sunlight that moved with the movement of the ship fell from the half-open hatch across the floor. Our backs braced against two of the ship's timbers, our cloaks about us, we made ourselves as comfortable as we could.

It was soon dark, our patch of sunlight gone. Sukey slept soundly beside me while I lay long awake as much from the movement of the ship as from the distress and hurry of my thoughts. I had been aware of no more than a slight pitching motion at first. But now that night was here the *Esperance* appeared to be heeling over. Everything within sight leaned or sloped dizzily. The floor of the hold sloped upwards from my feet; the ship's side supporting my head and shoulders tilted backwards. The movement was hard to foresee, harder still to provide against. I had made several voyages in my uncle's ships; I was no stranger to the sea. And yet, imprisoned in the hold as we were on this journey, I could not help but feel alarmed.

The lanterns swung wildly on their iron hooks, casting long sliding beams on the ship's sides. Giant shadows seemed to stalk hard upon each other's heels upon the floor. The spare jackets and cloaks my companions had hung conveniently upon nails danced on air. And all the while a devil's chorus of sounds filled my ears — the creaks and groans from every part of the ship herself, the scuffle and thump of the sailors' feet on the deck overhead, the murmurs and groans of my companions on every side,

and for the first time, soft but menacing, the sway and slop of the loose water in the bilges.

From all this I could only suppose for my own comfort of mind that we were doing nothing more terrifying than rounding the Forelands and approaching the open sea.

No sooner had I done my best to dispose of one set of fears than a worse terror took hold. The same questions returned again and again to my mind. How could I live, I asked myself, for fourteen years as a transported slave? What sort of person should I become in that time? Who among all those whom I loved would remember me?

Why none, I thought. And then it seemed to me that I was lost indeed, that all alike was dark. But still my thoughts churned on as though endlessly. They were concerned with Sukey now. What, I asked myself, could be done for her in this foul ship's hold when her time came? Was there anyone among the passengers whom I could enlist on her side? Whose help could I ask?

Why I should be so concerned for a Sukey who was so little concerned for herself I did not know. I must always turn busy-body, I supposed, wherever I was. On that reflection, so wholesome for myself, I drew my hood well down over my eyes and presently drifted into sleep.

Morning came, our patch of sunlight (which served us for a clock), distant and small upon the floor. I was no nearer knowing what could be done for Sukey.

She herself supplied some sort of answer. From having been too silent the night before she could not now be prevented from talking.

All her complaint once more was of the Corporal. "He'll never think of me," she said, "when I'm not with him. He'll never think of anybody when he has been away from them for long. And now I must have this child of his that I never wanted and leave young William that I loved, that was part of me. Oh, I can't bear it, I can't. I wish I might tear this child out of me and be rid of it, I do. I wish I might die and the waters close over me."

"Don't grieve so, Sukey, don't," I said.

"I won't then if you don't wish me to," she declared, quietening suddenly. "For 'tis always the same thing. But I wish

I was in my own bed and clean once more, I do. That would comfort me."

She lay down again. As she did so the ship's lantern that served our portion of the hold swung towards us with the motion of the ship.

In the light it shed I saw that Sukey had an audience of two besides myself. I had taken particular note of the older of the two women when we came on board. What story, I had wondered then, lay behind so handsome and yet so ravaged a face? I would have spoken to her now but before I could do so she was gone with a stiff rustle of skirts, walking very steadily on the whole over that tilting floor.

Her companion remained. Hands clasping her knees, her head upon them, she sat very still. Her cloak was grey. I could not see her face.

I spoke to her. "Mistress -- "

She turned her head. "The name is Peters, Jane Peters." The eyes that met mine were a clear light grey, the hair that escaped in curls beneath her hood seemed white. "You were going to ask about Mrs Milliner who has just left us," she said. "I know her well. But first, Mrs Deborah, if I may call you so, I cannot pretend I have not overheard your talk. I had no wish to do so at first but then, having begun to listen, I could not shut my ears. I hope that you will forgive me as I, in your place, would forgive you."

At once I gave her the assurance she asked for. "I can tell from your manner, ma'am," I said, "that you were bred up very differently from most of them that travel with us."

"I take no credit to myself," she returned, "on that account. We are all convicts, we are all alike condemned. I myself am here on a false charge of stealing brought against me by my late employer while I was a governess in her house. Her eldest son by a former marriage, who had professed in secret the tenderest passion for me, did nothing to clear my name. Instead, out of a slavish fear of his mother's displeasure he removed himself to a quieter place. But do not let us speak of him. Prudence in a lover is something I never could admire.

"You would like me to tell you something of Mrs Milliner.

She and I became acquainted when we were together in the Gatehouse Prison, Westminster. A vast deal of deference was paid to her there by turnkeys and the like. I am convinced it was due as much to her character, which is truly remarkable, as to the length of her purse.

"We women are weak creatures, Mrs Deborah. We clutch at love wherever it is to be found and we spend our lives, and lose our reputations often enough also, in the hope of a settlement and safety. Mrs Milliner has learned better. She has learned to make her world and live in it too. When you are more closely acquainted with her you will notice how she will narrow her eyes in order to see better. In life she has done much the same thing. She cares only for money. She will do nothing out of kindness.

"Where her trade is concerned — if it is her trade you are interested in — she is as good a midwife as can be found, one moreover who is as skilful in hurrying children out of this world as she is in ushering them safely in. But if you are thinking of employing her for Mrs Sukey I must warn you again that she will do nothing, good or bad, unless you pay her well."

"Tell me more of her," I said.

"There is not much more to tell," Mrs Peters said. "She began life as a milliner in a grand shop off Cheapside. When she was no more than fifteen she was left by a fine gentleman with a few guineas in her pocket and a child to keep. When her guineas were gone she took to selling herself. What else had she to sell? But then her fortunes changed. She found a new employer, an old retired bawd who had turned midwife herself. It was from this employer that Mrs Milliner, or so I understand from her own lips, learned her trade."

"Then I will speak to her." Fully resolved I got at once to my feet.

Mrs Peters looked over her shoulder. "Here our lady comes. Is she not like a wasp in her striped gown?"

Before I could speak Mrs Milliner herself silenced me. "Spare your breath. I have no mind to play the midwife to your Mrs Sukey or any other harlot on board."

"Mrs Sukey is no harlot and never could be," I declared.

"So much the worse for her." With an angry swish to

her skirts Mrs Milliner made off again.

Thrusting her hair out of her eyes Sukey, whom I had felt certain was asleep, attacked at once.

"A harlot, am I? Then what is she by the wagging of her tail and the look on her face? I declare I would rather perish than beg a favour of her."

At this speech, delivered in carrying tones, several other women gathered round expectantly and Mrs Milliner came winging back. "What right have you, miss," she demanded, standing over Sukey, "to speak of kindness? 'Tis a thing of no meaning, soon worn out, soon turned to malice, soon forgot. My advice to you is, have done with kindness. Turn to and help yourself."

"Help myself I will," Sukey declared, scrambling to her feet. "What's more, I'll have this baby and disappoint you and everybody else and myself as well." She sat down again. "Bo'sun will help if it comes to helping," she declared. "Something tells me . . ."

"God save us," I cried in fresh alarm. "Surely, Sukey, you are not thinking of putting the Bo'sun in the Corporal's place?"

"I don't know what I shall do if I am hard put to it, honest I don't," Sukey admitted, "and that's the truth." She turned on me crossly. "Now let be, Mrs Deb, do. I can't be for ever bothering about this baby. I've bothered enough. If I went on I should go clean out of my mind, I know I should. I've got to live, haven't I? If I can. And I've got to sew this rose on my hat too. 'Tis nearly off and the hat's no good without it. And I like a hat." She began rummaging in the small pillow slip that contained all her possessions. "Now where's my needle and thread? Ah, here they are." She discovered them.

Head bent, tongue protruding a little between her teeth, she set to work upon the hat fairly contentedly.

* * *

For the next few days we who were passengers on board the *Esperance* did no more, I think, than preserve ourselves. We did not draw closer together. Instead, by a kind of instinct we drew apart.

In general Sukey and I were content with each other's company. After those first confidences of hers Mrs Peters had

little to say. Whenever it was light enough, or the movement of the ship allowed, she occupied herself with a curious embroidery upon velvet of peacocks and pheasants perched on a blossoming tree.

Mrs Milliner occupied herself very differently. Half her time was spent in making a great many entries in a red leather notebook. The other half was devoted to her toilet. She would brush her dark hair until it was as sleek as a cat's fur. She would polish her nails endlessly on the palm of one hand first and then on a leather pad.

A day or two after the exchange between Sukey and herself she moved nearer us. I might have wished her elsewhere if it had not been for two pieces of lambswool with which, somewhat ostentatiously, she plugged her ears.

Sukey took grave exception to them. "I wish she might plug her nose too and die o' breathlessness," she declared.

I could not blame Mrs Milliner for joining us. Our quarters in the hatch-end of the hold were as far removed as possible from the fights and brawls of the forward end. When these occurred the Boatswain and the Second Mate would appear as though from nowhere and quieten them very effectively with thwacks of a rope's end.

Since we in our part of the hold gave no trouble the Bo'sun showed us only his bluff sociable side. He appeared to have a special fondness for Sukey over and above the extra consideration due to her as one who would soon, in his own language, make two. Those of us who were immediately around Sukey shared in the favours he bestowed — the extra blankets (smelling most villainously of horses), a little cheese now and then, even a hot mash of salt beef and ship's biscuit to remind us of the fleshpots we had left behind.

In more ordinary moments the Bo'sun continued formidable. He looked it, too, in his square-rigged jacket, his rope's end knotted and looped over his right wrist, a straight knife in a leather sheath at his belt. Short and thick-set to the point of bulkiness, he moved with a quick springing gait like a boxer on stout legs and small shapely feet.

Tough customer though he was, whenever I ventured to

question him on our whereabouts he would invariably answer courteously. In this way I learned something of the course the ship was following and could arrive at some notion of the hazards we had still to face.

After about four days, as near as I could reckon, we were clear of the Channel and round Ushant, standing away to the South-west across the Bay. "Pray for a quiet passage of the Bay and no storms," the Bo'sun had said.

We had prayed and our prayers seemed answered. It appeared quieter overhead. The ship stretched on steadily, only the swish and slap of the passing seas to be heard. The weather was warmer, the hatch was left open more frequently and for longer periods; we could see the sky.

So happy a state could not last. On the eleventh day after our setting-out trouble overtook us in earnest. It fell on us without warning. We had slept as much or as little as usual with no more than an uneasy thought of danger. We were wakened by a violent change in the movement of the ship.

As far as we could tell we appeared to be proceeding in steep rushing climbs and dizzy headlong descents. The new violent motion increased every moment. For a while we endured it calmly. But before long the many sounds beating upon our ears — the thunder of the waves and the crash of the seas, each oncoming wave mounting hard on the retreat of the one before; the howling of the wind sounding in the rigging first, then travelling down the sides of the ship; the creaking and groaning of the spars — robbed us of every other sense and left us full of fear.

All that day the storm raged. Towards evening, when our spirits were low and the thought of the darkness to come made all things more terrible, it increased greatly in power and fury. The *Esperance* trembled now under the impact of wind and seas; the wind shrieked in the rigging; a little further off, as it were, a dull booming sound could be heard like the not so distant bombardment of great guns. For the first time water was to be seen flowing in thin cold runnels of green down the ship's sides and all the while the swooping and climbing motion of the ship, which was the chief cause of our distress, was intensified.

About seven of the clock, p.m., as far as I could make out, the

change I had been waiting for came, the moment of danger when all things under the hand of fate, whether ships or men, come to their end, or, fate turning aside for a space, go on again.

Sukey moaned beside me. "Mrs Deborah, speak to me."

I could not do so for the many fearful sounds that filled my ears. A sudden rending and cracking of wood, as if a mast had gone, made itself heard. A monstrous flapping and tearing sound was added. It came once and once only. Both were new. Nearer still, and more frightening for us in the hold were the repeated blows like battering rams we could hear and feel against the ship's side. For a moment, as if she were relieved of so much press of sail, the *Esperance* appeared to stand upright in the water. Almost immediately, as if all direction were gone, she did no more than wallow helplessly in the trough of the seas.

The storm continued. During the night, the second we were obliged to endure, we passed, I think, from an extremity of fear almost to indifference and then, through moments of relief, transitory once more, to fear again.

Conditions in the hold worsened rapidly. There was not a receptacle, however noisome, that had not spilled over; there were not more than half a dozen women among us, of whom Sukey and Mrs Milliner and myself were three, who had not been driven to vomiting. From the battering the *Esperance* had received the leakage on the port side, which had always alarmed us, reached a new point of danger. Crawling on all fours and clinging to the Bo'sun's life-lines, we made our way with the utmost difficulty to the other or starboard side. Even there we were invaded by water from the bilges. Black as octopus ink and more stinking, it found its way with every plunge of the ship between the timbers of the hold.

About midnight Sukey took a firmer grasp of my hand. "Stay with me."

I stayed with her until matters for her and the child had progressed so far I dare delay no longer. On hands and knees, for the movement of the ship continued so violent I feared to stand, I went in search of Mrs Milliner.

Not fifteen yards away, for by this time we were all crowded together like a clutter of farmyard hens, she was

braced against a ship's timber, polishing her finger nails.

"For the love of God," I begged, "come."

"Not I." Her breath, nicely redolent of brandy, fanned my cheek. "Let the wench help herself."

I might have pleaded with her if Sukey's voice, pitched so high it seemed drawn into a scream, had not summoned me.

Quicker than I had come I returned. Already a dozen or more women were crowding round Sukey. If one or two were moved by pity the rest, it was plain, had only come to stare. I took what advice was offered, I did what common-sense and kindness required. It was not enough. As the night wore on Sukey's pains increased; they came more frequently. At what hour of the night she cried out a second time I do not know. Once more her cry strengthened me for what must be done yet set me trembling.

The women pressed closer. Suddenly Mrs Milliner was to be seen elbowing her way through them in what appeared to be high good humour to Sukey's side. "Out of my way, hussies," I heard. "Out. Out."

Sleeves rolled up, she set at once to work.

A hand on her arm, I spoke foolishly. "The child must live."

She looked at me. "Do you think I murder for nothing, fool?"

From this moment I was sent on one errand after another in search of all that Sukey might need. While the storm raged I could obtain neither warm water nor fresh bedding nor the gruel that might restore Sukey's strength. In desperation at last I hammered with a spare piece of timber on the sliding hatch of the companion way, hoping that the Bo'sun himself might hear.

It was impossible that he should do so. The noise of the storm drowned all other sounds and the Bo'sun, like every other member of the ship's company, could have no thought for anything but the ship's safety. I knew this as well as I know it now, yet I went on hammering.

In this way it happened that I was absent from Sukey when she called again, high-pitched as before. With that final cry her child was born. Though I hurried back, from the number of women about her I could not come near.

I held my breath from the pain I felt at that other cry that

seemed to come an instant after hers — a cry so protesting, so lusty and yet so small. The child lived, I thought, and would live.

I turned away. Whether the pain I felt sprang from envy of Sukey's lot or from a stirring of old sorrow I cannot be certain. It left me. As it did so I was aware of the quietness that follows so great a stir. The quietness was in me, I thought. A little apart from them all I listened again. And now the storm that had been falling away unnoticed did indeed appear to be stilled.

Once more, most irritably this time, Mrs Milliner waved me back. Once more I went in search of the Bo'sun. This time the hatch was slid open. I was hauled on deck; the hatch was slid back into place and the Carpenter, if indeed it was the Carpenter who confronted me, retreated towards the foc'sle. I was alone once more.

If it is possible to see immensity I saw it then. The dawn was yellowing in the east, a full moon was fleeting between fast-moving clouds; the stars sinking over the ship's bows were fugitive and bright; the sea showed black, laced with long streaks of foam; the flanks of the waves that hissed like a thousand serpents against the ship's sides were full of greenish gleams. Under its thin sheet of water the deck was alive with shadows — the swinging shadows of the ropes, the black moving shadows of the masts, the fast-racing shadows of the clouds.

There was chaos too. The ship's bulwarks were smashed here and there, leaving ragged gaps in the planks through which the sea surged; tangled ropes and blocks and broken spars littered the deck; torn ends of ropes streamed out horizontally from the mast or, weighted with blocks, knocked repeatedly against the yards. Though the mainmast stood the topmast, as I feared, had been carried away; the fore topmast, brought down no doubt in the crash that had terrified us, had followed.

I could hear only the noise of the wind and the straining of the timbers and all the smaller sounds — the flap of torn canvas shreds and the water slopping in the scuppers — I could see none. From time to time a wave more leisurely than the rest would rear up over the foc'sle and cascade on deck. Drenched by spray, my eyes lashed with little stinging showers, I could scarcely see while the lifelines stretched between the masts appeared impossibly far off.

I was beginning to admit defeat when once more everything changed. In a momentary gleam of lantern light as the foc'sle door opened and shut the crouched figures of the Watch could be seen. The Bo'sun himself appeared from among them. Swinging from hand-hold to hand-hold along the side of the ship, he made towards me.

I attempted to speak to him. But from the howling of the wind, which was still considerable, I could not make myself heard. Under the lee of an opposite bulwark it was easier. One hand keeping a firm grip on my arm, he faced me.

What was it now? he demanded.

I told him what it was. "Mrs Sukey's child, Master Bo'sun," I said, "is born."

He appeared transfixed. "When?"

"About fifteen minutes back," I said.

He continued to stare. "The storm abated then," at last he said.

"About then." I rushed on boldly. "I must have warm water for Mrs Sukey, if you please, Master Bo'sun, and hot gruel to follow."

He did not appear to hear.

"Near foundering," he said, "our main topmast gone and the fore topmast after it. Four feet o' water in the bilges — and that's not all. The Captain lost overboard and Blanes and Holder with him. Two more hurt so bad they're near perishing . . ." His grip loosened on my arm. "You spoke to me."

I repeated what I had said. I thought his wits had gone. "We've a new living soul among us, Master Bo'sun," I reminded him, "crying most valiantly."

"Them that drowned cried too," he said, "not so valiantly. I heard them cry." He thrust his face, strangely convulsed, nearer mine. "Three dead," he said, "and one born. Where's the sense of it?" He shook my arm. "Tell this to them below. Say we've fourteen men left and a ship to work and keep from foundering. Say the chain pumps will be starting up before long — they'll hear 'em clanking. A twelve hour spell this time, it's likely, and a spell of four hours out of every twelve after that, or she'll be foundering. Say I'll have quiet down below from this time on.

I'll have no more screaming." He propelled me towards the hatch. "Mrs Sukey shall have what she wants. As for you, ma'am, I'll trouble you to stay below and do no more hammering."

"Ay, ay, Master Bo'sun," I said, "ay, ay."

* * *

We had set out during the first week of September. On the tenth day after we had left Wapping we had run into the storm. And now, so badly damaged as to be without hope of completing our passage, we turned for home.

All the way up the Channel the fair weather held, the smooth swell that had followed the storm continued. Helped by a north-westerly wind the ship, crippled though she was, moved on in an easy swinging motion with so little sound of wind and waves it seemed like silence.

When we had once more rounded the South Foreland and were in the Downs not more than twenty of us were allowed on deck for the first time. Crowded together in the ship's waist, we looked about us. As the wind changed and the *Esperance* began to heel over the chalk cliffs of Kent could be seen on the lee side and the green hills beyond. We had wept when they faded from our sight; now that they were restored to us we wept again.

Having passed the North Foreland we continued, the wind behind us now, to make good progress towards London River. A light gauzy mist full of faint rainbow hues lay over the Essex marshes; on our right was the sea, grey as a gull's back, and the long stretch of Foulness sand yellowish-brown in the light of the setting sun. The land on the Essex side continued to rise gently as we moved on. And now, though the light was beginning to fail I believed I could glimpse the tower of Leigh Church, square and grey, rising out of the mist. Before long, as the land closed in from both sides it was plain that London River flowed under us at last.

Not until ten of the clock the next morning, wind and tide having failed us, were we able to leave the Lower Hope Reach where we had anchored for the night and go on once more. At Greenhithe a congregation of fishing vessels hailed us. One or two of their skippers were allowed on board. From them we heard

great news indeed — for me it was the best news of all — that the peaceful Revolution the majority of the country desired was here. The greater part of the fleet, it was said, under the command of Admiral Lord Herbert had gone over to Prince William of Orange; the army at the first opportunity would follow.

Sailing fast sometimes when the wind favoured us, more slowly sometimes when the wind fell away, we passed Deptford. Everywhere as we went along other craft hailed us; everywhere we were greeted by small crowds stationed along the shore. Whatever else might be in doubt — and a great deal was still in doubt for us all — it was clear that the story of our misfortunes had gone before us, that we were welcome home.

My heart overflowing with thankfulness, I moved nearer Sukey. Feet planted firmly apart, the crumpled red face of the Corporal's daughter just visible in the folds of her cloak, she looked impatiently ahead. Her chip hat was tied beneath her chin, the blue rose that had hung dejectedly by a thread when we set out was securely in place.

My eyes on the child, I came closer. "What will you call her, Sukey?"

"Esperance." Sukey turned her head. "Bo'sun says it's a French name."

"What has he to do with it?" I said.

She spoke crisply. "He swears he'll marry me when we get on shore and he'll take young William and this child too and be glad. And so he ought to be," she added, "two fine children, you might say, and me as well and all for nothing."

Mrs Milliner joined us. "What is Mrs Sukey talking about? Marrying?"

"I am not sure." I looked at Sukey.

"I'd rather be single," Sukey said. "Honest I would. But I can't be now." She addressed Mrs Milliner. "Bo'sun reckons we can all get away safe if we are minded to with everything so topsy-turvy in London and everywhere roundabout."

"That could be true." Grown thoughtful all at once, Mrs Milliner moved away.

"I wish our friends might be at Wapping to meet us," I said uneasily.

"You mean Mr Marshall and Mrs Calvert and them," Sukey said.

I looked at her. "I had the Corporal in mind too."

"Oh, *him*," Sukey said. She transferred the Corporal's daughter deftly to her other arm.

About six p.m., as the sun was sinking over the bows in an orange-coloured mist we crept in, anchoring about fifty yards from the Wapping shore.

At once the many small craft that had kept company with us from Greenhithe drew alongside and the large crowd that had been waiting surged forward. Clearly our troubles were by no means over. Everyone among the crowd appeared to be armed. There were sailors in the first rank, cutlass on hip, and a few Foot soldiers beside them, conspicuous in their scarlet coats. There were tradesmen with thick staves in their hands and sober-looking citizens with swords and flails; there were a number of women besides, every one of them furnished, I did not doubt, with a dagger at her waist.

While the craft that had kept company with us were drawing alongside a flotilla of small boats active as water beetles put out towards us from the Wapping shore. In the same moment the hatch to the hold was slid back and the remaining thirty or so women prisoners who had stayed below began to fight their way into the light. Some were trampled underfoot from the onset; others, thrust on by those behind, could not help but fall forward. Some of these rolled a little way most perilously towards the scuppers; the rest, teeth bared, fingers crooked like claws, came on savagely.

As if all this were not sufficiently terrifying, the crews and passengers of the two flotillas of boats, those that had followed us from Greenhithe and those that had put out from Wapping appeared about to come on board. We could hear the sound of oars being unshipped and the hollow knocking together of the boats' sides. Hands first, then heads and shoulders appeared over the bulwarks. Leaping on to the deck, their owners followed.

For a time all was terror and confusion. The women who were surging up from the hold poured in upon those of us who were in the ship's waist. From the weight of numbers alone those

of us who were already on deck were thrust back upon each other. Closely packed as we were, struck and buffeted without mercy by those pressing in upon us from all sides, we swayed this way, then that helplessly.

At first I had succeeded in keeping Sukey near me. But now, at the height of the confusion, we were torn apart.

In something like terror I called to her, "Sukey, Sukey."

At once, very stoutly indeed, she answered me. "Here. Here."

I caught sight of her then, mounted upon a coil of rope, holding on to the rigging with one hand while the Corporal's daughter, mouth wide open, yelled lustily above the din. A red coat caught my gaze. The Corporal himself was making his way irresistibly towards us. Men were persuaded to one side, women were lifted up neatly by the waist and set down again. The Bo'sun, all rivalry forgotten for the moment, followed.

It was Sukey they sought, only Sukey, I told myself. I turned my head away in something like despair and was aware of Marshall, disguised and almost obscured in a sailor's jacket of frieze, bearing down upon me. Never, I felt once more, never was any embrace more welcome or more enveloping.

PART SEVEN

RETURN TO THE WEST

THE SIXTEENTH DAY OF OCTOBER

I SOMETIMES think that in this country we have the weather in our souls so often has it ruled our lives and brought us out of danger into safety. Certainly wind and weather were never more present in our minds than in the October and November of sixteen eighty-eight when all England waited anxiously for the wind to change.

It had blown westerly for more than two weeks now. It blew westerly still with never a sign of change when Marshall and I set out on the Sixteenth of October from Mrs Calvert's lodging for our rendezvous with Sukey and the Corporal at the *Four Swans* in Bishopsgate.

It was common knowledge by this time that as long ago as June the Thirtieth, the day of the acquittal of the Bishops, Admiral Lord Herbert had left London on a secret mission to Prince William of Orange and his wife, Princess Mary of England, at the Hague. Disguised as an ordinary seaman he had carried with him a formal invitation to them to take over the English throne. By this time also everyone knew that the invitation had been accepted and that a combined Dutch and English fleet, together with a great number of transports loaded with arms and men, were waiting at Helvetssluis in Holland for the easterly wind that would bring them safely to some English port.

From Cheapside Marshall and I moved on down Poultry. Before us the church of St. Mary le Bow reared its new steeple to the sky. In full view of the church we paused. Here the crowds stood dense and deep. Faces upturned, men and women waited silently, their eyes on the weather vane, a golden dragon, wings outspread. Glittering bright gold against the melting sky, it pointed West.

"Pray for a Protestant wind, mistress," a woman beside me said. "It is a Popish wind that blows now."

It blew steadily, I thought, and coldly also. I shivered. When would it change? Tucking my arm in his, Marshall drew me on.

Newly built since the Great Fire, the *Four Swans* showed elegant and fine. The touches of gilt on the balustrades of the six balconies shone; by contrast the four swans set in a frieze over the central arch showed milky-white.

His two hands spread, Landlord Richards welcomed us in. Our two fowls were almost ready, he announced, going before us and dragging one leg as he did so, our wine was cooled, a ripe Stilton cheese soaked in port wine awaited our attention and the inn parlour, for as long as we had any mind for it, was ours.

We were ushered inside. Sukey, the Corporal beside her, greeted us from the ingle-nook beside the fire. In the next second the door of the parlour flew open and the Bo'sun, somewhat to my surprise, came buffeting in like the first breath of a storm.

" 'Tis the Bo'sun, I do declare." Sukey got to her feet in a dramatic flurry of petticoats, then sat down hurriedly. "Bo'sun Daniel Jacobs," she announced in trembling tones.

The Bo'sun bowed stiffly. "I've been bidden here by Mrs Sukey. I hope I'm welcome." He laid a bottle of Holland Schnapps on the table as he spoke.

Marshall motioned him to a chair. "Sit you down, Master Bo'sun, sit you down."

The Bo'sun sat down, lifting the skirts of his blue coat as he did so.

"Coming with me, ain't you, Mrs Sukey?" he demanded.

"I never promised I would," Sukey declared. "Not in so many words. We was to talk about it, Bo'sun. That's what I said."

"Talk about what?" said the Corporal.

"Talk about me." Sukey drew a deep breath. "Bo'sun Jacobs says you don't have to trouble about me any more, Corporal. Not that you ever did trouble very much — I told him that. *He'll* marry me, Bo'sun says, and take both the children and be thankful."

The Corporal shot out both legs under the table. "I'll see him damned first."

One hand, clenched and brown, on the table the Bo'sun answered him. "I've been damned a long while, soldier, remember that."

"Now don't you two begin sparring up yet awhile, either of you," Sukey said nervously, "not with the dinner nearly ready and all of us so peckish from this wind that's a-blowing. I declare I don't want to go with either of you if the truth be told. But I've got to go somewhere, I suppose, along with somebody. Or something. I do wish I didn't have to. I wish it didn't have to be a man or a woman, every time. There did ought to be something comfortable in between."

"Why, Sukey, that's downright wicked of you," the Corporal declared, deeply shocked. "Something between – what else could there be?"

"Plenty, you greenhorn," the Bo'sun said. "But bless her, she don't mean it. She ain't herself. She wants settling, that's all."

"Settling!" Sukey fastened on the word. "Two children in twenty months – I've been settled enough."

"Oh, Sukey!" I intended to reproach her but I could scarcely keep from laughing.

"Well, it's true." A shade complacently Sukey straightened her chip hat.

At this point Landlord Richards and his two assistants, bearing a load of piled-up plates and dishes before them, came in.

"Where sits the wind now, gentlemen?" Landlord Richards enquired while sharpening his great carving knife.

"Still in the same quarter," the Bo'sun said. "But she's bound to turn." He laid hold of the bottle of Schnapps. "Women and wine," said he, "though this ain't wine."

Sukey spoke nervously again. "Don't go on so about women, Bo'sun. I'm sure you don't care all that much for them."

"Ah, but I do, my dear," the Bo'sun said. "Pretty near always did. Pretty near always shall."

"It's winds you ought to know about, sailor," the Corporal said with a far from friendly stare. "What's all this about winds anyway – East winds, West winds?"

"Want me to tell you, soldier?" The Bo'sun leaned forward.

"Have some wine, do. Not those nasty Schnapps," Sukey said.

"Never nasty to me," said the Bo'sun. "Never." He filled his glass.

A shade more obligingly but still in rasping tones he addressed the Corporal. "I'll tell you about winds, soldier. What's more, I'll draw 'em for you."

After some fumbling he produced a piece of French chalk such as tailors use from his jacket pocket. "See here," he said, beginning to draw with the chalk on the rough surface of the table, "this here is Holland. And this" — here he drew waves like small crested mountains — "is the North Sea or German Ocean. Though it's no more German than I am and never will be. Now," he went on, "now, we'll have this cruet stand for England" — here he moved the inn cruet to his left. "That's right. Now this part round about England is the region of the Westerlys, Westerly winds, soldier, I mean. Suppose you're where that cruet is you can't help meeting them — Sou-west winds, then West, then Nor-West. That clear?" Eyes on the Corporal, he paused.

"No," he said, "I can see it ain't clear. Well, it don't matter. What you've got now won't last. Sooner or later the wind'll turn. What you'll get then, soldier, sure as daylight, will be South-south-east winds, South-east winds and then East winds. As I said." He flung down his chalk. "Mind you, there's no counting on these Easterly slants. They break up sudden, turning to rain often enough with a Westerly gale to follow."

"And after that," Marshall said, "the same thing over again?"

"You've got it, mate," the Bo'sun said. "What about you, soldier?"

But the Corporal's eyes were glazed from too much listening.

"Let's eat," the Bo'sun said. "I've wasted my time."

In a remarkably short while the first course was despatched; the second, which consisted of Sherry Syllabubs and Apple Pie, served.

The Bo'sun continued to show the same aggressive heartiness he had shown at first, Sukey continued to look nervous, the Corporal sulked and glowered. Stretching out his long legs under the table and immediately folding them up again, he kicked me repeatedly. The last Syllabub was disposed of, a coal fell on to the holystoned hearth. In the commotion that followed, the Stilton cheese was conducted in by Landlord Richards and set down.

"Stilton cheese," the Bo'sun pronounced, "ought to be ate

with a spoon. But if the cheese is ripe a knife will do." Knife in hand, he helped himself.

Leaning back in his chair, he addressed Landlord Richards. "Where did you get that gammy leg of yours, landlord? It wouldn't be in the Low Countries under His Grace o' Monmouth, would it now?"

"Under His Grace of Monmouth it was," Landlord Richards replied. "A very gallant feeling young gentleman if I may be allowed to say so."

"Pretty well the best of that bunch," the Bo'sun declared. "Bastard or no. Come to think of it," he continued, looking down with every sign of satisfaction at his plate, "there's no reason in nature why a man's bastards shouldn't be a sight better than his legitimates. The only trouble, o'course, is that a man can't ever be certain who his bastards are. No, nor how many there is of 'em."

In great distress Sukey interrupted him. "How can you talk so, Bo'sun? I can't abear that word, I never could . . . If my two are bastards it's not their fault. I'm sure I never meant them to be."

"I don't know what you are on about, Sukey," the Corporal complained, "unless it's the same old thing you've always been on about that we ain't married yet."

"It is that, oh, it is," Sukey admitted with a sob. "What else could it be? Very tricky you've been with me, Corporal," she said, "since the first day we met. Such a promiser as you there never was, you faithless heartless thing'g."

"Why, Sukey . . ." The Corporal appeared quite overcome. "How can you speak to me so? And you and me so pleasant always, in bed and out of it, at all times of the day?"

"That's over." Sukey dashed away her tears.

"So it ought to be," the Bo'sun declared, fixing the Corporal with a virtuous stare.

"There's never been nobody but you, Sukey." The Corporal spoke as if he believed it too.

"Pretty near never and pretty near nobody, *he* means," the Bo'sun said. He drained his glass.

"Why don't you say what I want you to say, Corporal? Why don't you?" Sukey wailed.

"Say what?" Blinking his long lashes, the Corporal looked helplessly at us all. "What have I got to say now?"

"Poor chap! He don't understand," the Bo'sun said. "Strong in the arm and thick in the head — he's a Lobster all over."

"What's that?" The Corporal shot up suddenly. "I'll knock the living daylights out of you, sailor, that's what I'll do."

"I'm good at a grapple myself, matey," the Bo'sun returned. "I like it, see? Board me," he said, warming to his subject, "board me, I'll stave your face in, soldier, I'll leave you like a bit of some lost battlefield, like a nice piece of carrion, like a dead Frenchman, so help me I will."

It was Sukey's turn to start up. "Such language I won't hear, Bo'sun," she announced. "And I won't be fought over neither. I've never been *that* yet. It's me one of you means to marry. Me, and I'll choose."

"Choose then," the Bo'sun said with a hard look. "Choose now."

"I'm grateful to you, Bo'sun, I am," Sukey said. "I'll always be grateful . . ."

"You're choosing *him* — " The Bo'sun was on his feet. "You're choosing him?"

Even Sukey quailed. "Well, he's mine," she declared defiantly. "Even if he's no good I'm used to him."

"No good?" said the Corporal, "no good? Why, I'll marry you any time, Sukey, I swear I will." A little late he clasped her to him.

"So that's it." The Bo'sun began somewhat slowly to button his jacket. "So that's how she blows. I've been useful. You've brought him to the water, Mrs Sukey. But it was me that made him drink."

Hat in hand, he turned towards the door, then paused. "Rot me," he swore, ramming his hat down on his head with both hands, "rot me if I stay single for all that. Ain't you got no sisters, Mrs Sukey?"

"Two." Sukey almost pleaded with him. "Two, Bo'sun. Pleasaunce and Mercy."

"Make it Pleasaunce," the Bo'sun said. He went out and the door banged to behind him.

"Oh, he's gone." Sukey wept on the Corporal's shoulder from a mingling of sorrow and relief. She looked up. "If Pleasaunce don't have him," she announced, "Mercy will."

"Ah, poor chap! I'm downright sorry for him," the Corporal said.

In sight of Bow Church once more we bade Sukey and the Corporal goodbye. All of a flutter like a bride, Sukey embraced me; the Corporal kissed my cheek. Marshall and I moved on. The streets, so crowded when we set out, appeared almost deserted now. I wondered why.

Marshall held my arm and his grip hurt. "Do you not see the wind has changed?"

Then indeed I saw. Bow's weather vane, dragon wings outspread, pointed east.

2

RETURN TO THE WEST

ALAS! the Easterly wind, as the Bo'sun had warned us, did not hold. Scarcely had the combined Dutch and English fleets set sail than the wind changed once more, a westerly gale sprang up and compelled Prince William and all his ships to return to port.

So now both Dutch and English alike waited a second time for the wind to turn.

It had long been agreed between the Lieutenant and Marshall and myself that whenever invasion by the Prince of Orange appeared certain I must leave London, I must return to the West. Not until the Twenty-ninth of October did Marshall come knocking on Mrs Calvert's door.

* * *

It was cold when we set out with a tingle of frost and more than a hint of winter in the air. We travelled only slowly at first, for

the roads even at this early hour were thronged with coaches moving out of London and small companies of armed men riding in.

Marshall was queerly intent on comforting me, though I needed no comfort, as we travelled on. "You have no need," he said, "to trouble yourself about Mrs Calvert or the child. They will be safe at Coombe Raleigh where they should be by this time. It is near Honiton and not too far from Lyme. And you need have no anxiety for the Lieutenant either. The Prince of Orange has a long head on his shoulders and is determined to arrange matters over here without bloodshed."

I interrupted him. "You say nothing of yourself. Do you think I am not concerned for you?"

He turned his head. "You may rest easy on that score also. When the Prince has no more need of me I'll away to the Low Countries again and take service with Marshal Schomberg. I shall have no cares then."

I spoke remorsefully. "I have been a care to you this long while."

At once he mocked me. "And you will always be grateful. Like Mrs Sukey."

"Not at all like Mrs Sukey." Somewhat hurt, I spoke lightly in return. "Tell me, did Mistress Pleasaunce fancy Bo'sun Jacobs?"

Marshall laughed. "He fancied Mercy."

"So they are settled and happy?" I said.

"How should I know?" he asked. "I have never been either. But shed no tears for me on that account, Mistress Deborah. We are as we are made."

Or as life makes us, I thought.

* * *

Sometimes talking, sometimes silent as now when talk was difficult we journeyed on. I do not remember what halts we made in those three days nor what we did. I remember chiefly the clear air about us, the freshness of the mornings and the weariness that overcame us before night.

Marshall's mood varied. He was cheerful one hour, impatient and out of humour the next, for ever noting the direction of the

wind and the movement of the clouds. Though we did not speak of it, our parting which came nearer with every mile we travelled weighed heavily upon us both. We had moved a long way, after all, from our first quarrelling. And now our acquaintance, though it was much more than that, was almost at an end. As a soldier of fortune he must move on to what sieges, what battlefields I might never know, while I, as Lieutenant Hobey's wife, must stay in the one place, loved and fulfilled after the fortunate way of women and three parts, or more than three parts, content.

* * *

The westerly winds and the uncertainty and anxiety they brought with them continued with us most of the way. Not until we had left Shaftesbury did the air blow colder. The branches of the trees moved differently, the small leaves from the hedgerows flew before us like hosts of russet-coloured birds, the sky once more carried a hint of lilac in its grey.

We halted on Winklebury Hill. It was here, Marshall reminded me, that the Duke had halted with his companions on his flight from the Battle of Weston Moor. The Wiltshire Plain, criss-crossed by ancient tracks and roads, lay before us greener than any sea. The grass, never cut, it was likely, on this round hill since the Men of the Stones were buried here, was dense and deep under our horses' feet. On one hand the Western Counties could be seen; on the other the South of England stretched in gentle undulating curves towards the distant sea. All about us the clouds were thin and vanishing, the wind — we had dismounted and stood side by side — whipped at our ankles, then streamed away.

Once more its direction had changed. For the second time this month, with not a hint of rain, it blew east.

From this moment we made what speed we could towards Lyme. At *The Blue Boar* at Axminster our landlord whispered to us that the Prince of Orange had once more set sail. Other rumours reached us as we went on — that the Prince had passed within a league of Dover and had saluted the Castle and the Governor with a fanfare of trumpets, that his ships were running down the Channel even now towards some western port.

With every mile we travelled now the sharper my own private

apprehensions grew. What place would there be for me, I asked, in Captain Julian's house when I returned? After the first few days what welcome should I find? And how long must I wait, even supposing everything went peacefully and well with the Prince of Orange and his Forces before my husband would be free to claim me?

"Come back," my aunt had written in another note brought to me by Joe the Gloucester carrier before Marshall and I set out. "Come back and find us again. You have been absent too long." She had always, I remembered, that gift for words, quick and warm and as though coming from the heart.

For a moment I saw my uncle's house on the cliff top again and the gleam of the setting sun in the long windows and the summer house at the garden's end. Did Mayor Alford, I wondered, sit there on warm days, smoking his pipe as my uncle had done? Did he look out, more anxiously than my uncle had ever looked, to sea?

Marshall spoke quietly. "We are nearly there."

My heart filling and softening with old sorrow, I rode on and did not answer him. Uplyme lay before us; here, within sight was the down where I had searched for Oliver that night he was taken and not found him, never again found him. For a moment I checked my horse.

"Never look back," Marshall said.

This time I answered him. "To-day I must."

On the brow of the hill leading into Lyme we dismounted. "It's over, it's finished," he said. His arms closed round me. For a second I stayed within them, I remember that moment now — once more everything seemed so still.

Having kissed me he let me go. "Well, it was time," he said.

So he left me. He had freed himself, I thought. Wherever life or chance might lead him he would go on again.

I rode on alone, and every tree, every inch of the road spoke to me. How changed was I, my mind went, how changed was everything now. All that I had loved and known was dissolved — like clouds, like smoke it had melted and gone, all the laughter, the merriment and the pain of life vanished where, into what silences?

MORE SHIPS IN THE BAY

AT NOON on the Fifth of November, as everyone knows, Prince William of Orange, Admiral Lord Herbert in command of a combined fleet of Dutch and English ships, anchored safely in Torbay.

It appeared little short of a miracle to those of us who watched and waited that he should do so, for his fleet had overshot the port most dangerously in a dense sea mist. For the ships to turn back in the easterly wind that drove them on was impossible. They dared not anchor, since what remained of the King's ships under the command of my Lord Dartmouth were following them, while to take shelter in Plymouth where the garrison was hostile was to invite the bloodshed no-one on the Prince's side desired.

Disaster, someone said afterwards, came so close that morning they could almost hear the stirring of its wings. But then, once more, the wind changed. Turning southerly, it brought the Prince's ships in smooth water safely into port.

* * *

Two days later I stood on the cliff top at Lyme where I had stood when this tale begins, looking out to sea. There were many more ships in the Bay now than I had seen then; there were so many I could not count them, each one flying England's Cross of Saint George and below it Prince William's banner of Nassau. As I watched numbers of small boats crowded with passengers put out from the ships and made for the shore and the crowds that had been moving joyfully along the Cob thinned out to greet them.

I waited for the Lieutenant to come to me as I had waited in that same spot three years ago for what I scarcely knew. It was cold waiting. The hoar frost lingered in white rapidly greening patches on the grass; I dare swear my nose was pink at the tip — I wished it might be alabaster-white just for to-day and touched it tenderly; Melinda Ann Mattravers (whom Mrs Calvert had brought to me from Coombe Raleigh only yesterday), plucked tearfully at my skirts while my cousin Dinah, stretching out one hand as if she were picking flowers, moved away. She had no

kind feelings towards Melinda Ann as yet. "Why," she had wished to know only this morning, "why must she always be crying?"

The sun shone out, the hoar frost vanished from the grass. Imperceptibly at first, then plain enough for everyone to see the ships began to move closer in. At once the church bells rang out in greeting, most joyfully. The chapel bell on Lyme Hill rang too, harsh and loud, harsh and loud, as if it were remembering, and the turf laid out before me on the cliff top appeared more than ever like another Monmouth banner of green.

By the flight of steps a boat grounded on the shore. I heard voices then – a fisherman's voice speaking the broad Dorset tongue I knew, "Here you be, zur. 'Tis w'home at last," and the Lieutenant's voice, very clear and carrying, "I've a debt to collect," and men's laughter.

They knew what manner of debt, I thought, vexed for a second while Dinah called to me from a little way off – what she called I did not hear – and Melinda Ann, perhaps because my hand had tightened painfully upon hers, once more started off crying.

I stooped to comfort her. When I straightened the Lieutenant was not more than a few yards away, smiling intently and coming swiftly towards me.

Melinda Ann by the hand, I went to meet him. "She's mine," I said. It was not what I had meant to say for I could seldom find the right words.

"Then I must have her for mine also," he said.

"If you will," I tried to say. But he stopped my mouth and closed my eyes and pretty nearly robbed me of breath too and the fishermen cheered out in the Bay and Melinda Ann stopped crying.

